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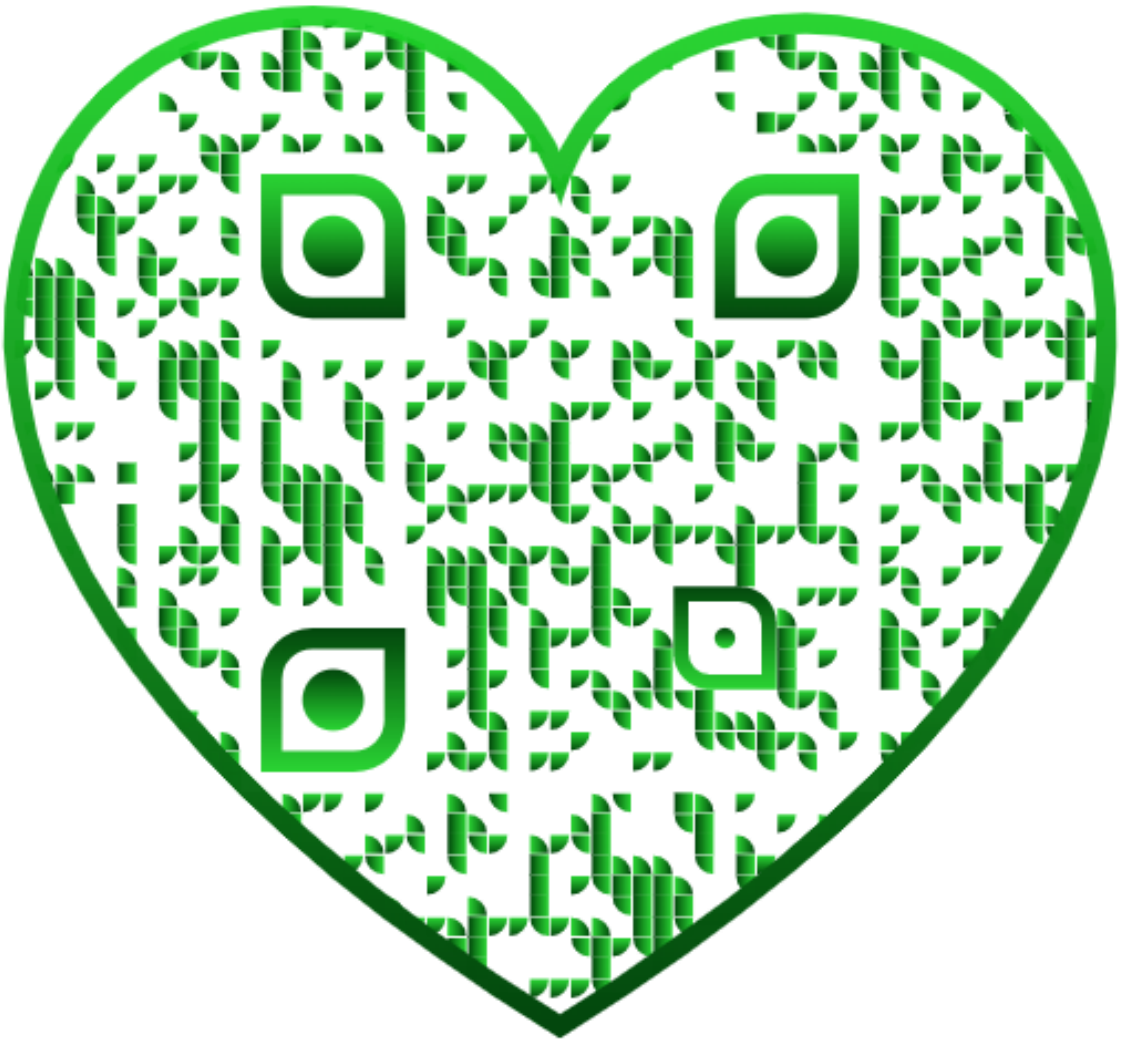

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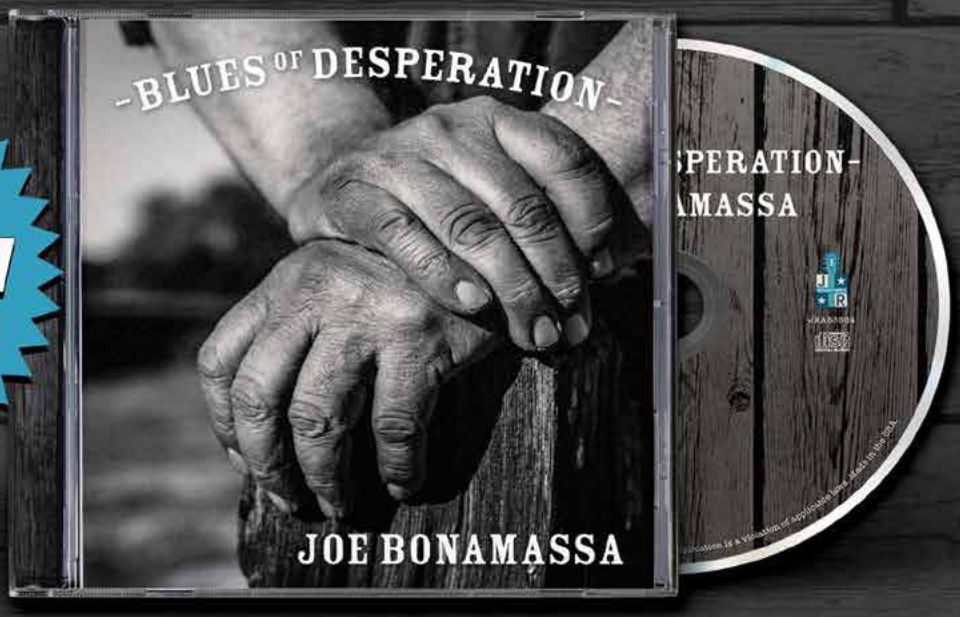

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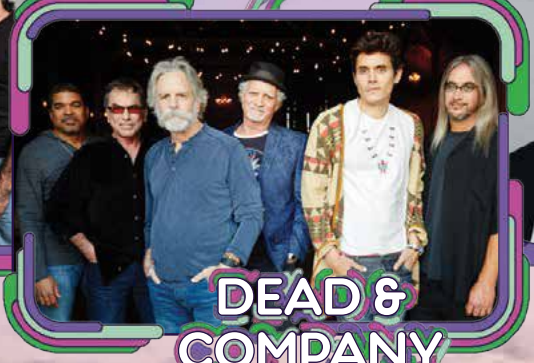

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Editor's Note

APRIL_MAY 2016

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V43 NO3

AS MOST OF MY FRIENDS will tell you with a well-deserved eye-roll, there are few things I enjoy more than a good indie-jam "outing." I'm definitely not trying to be mean-spirited—I personally think every good indie-rock band should have at least one groovy jamband ace up its sleeve, and every great jamband should have a dynamic indie-rock cover in its repertoire.

It's just that I've always found it silly that there was some preconceived notion that hippies and hipsters couldn't sit at the same cafeteria table, especially when those two not-so-different scenes share a similar DIY drive and grassroots spirit. And, over the years, it's certainly been great fun to watch the walls between Bonnaroo and Coachella crumble as more bands from the alternative world have claimed their latent, and not-so-latent, improvisational roots—and, across the board, the music world has been less concerned with traditional genre divides and more interested in what is genuine (and good).

I've also always been fascinated with where people come from and how the places they've lived, and the music they've listened to, have informed their tastes and perspectives. By and large, and after a few sighs, most of the blogger-buzz bands with heady roots that I've met on my own golden road to unlimited authenticity have mentioned that their love of the Grateful Dead, the Allman Brothers and their brethren not only shaped *how* they think about their own music, but also serve as vivid reminders of *why* they started playing music in the first place.

I'd be lying if I told you that I thought even one member of The National was an undercover Deadhead when I first saw them play at a tiny, white-walled Williamsburg bar in 2005—let alone so indebted to the Dead's

music that they'd release a loving, 59-track recital of their songbook just over a decade later. But I do remember walking away from that show knowing that I'd had a real, live experience that may never happen the exact same way again, which has been the true hallmark of the Grateful Dead since their Haight-Ashbury days.

As *Day of the Dead* producer and National guitarist Aaron Dessner explains with a knowing-Deadhead look in this month's cover story, their years-in-the-making project has been like "coming home" to the music that inspired most of The National when they were first learning to play their instruments and, in certain ways, continues to function as a guide as they navigate between sold-out amphitheater shows and a range of experimental side-projects.

Day of the Dead's domino effect is similar to a lot of Generation X musicians—Matt Berninger taught Scott Devendorf about Blues Traveler, Justin Vernon played Phish's *Hoist* for Megafaun's Joe Westerlund for the first time and a group of 30-somethings turned Bob Weir on to Wilco and Cass McCombs—which is why this album's story is so interesting and important.

"The festival scene has become a community of music lovers, no matter what genre of music is going on," The National's Matt Berninger says of the current live music climate. "On a widespread level, people are enjoying that retreat. They can go crazy for a weekend. It's about the romance of Woodstock and those Dead shows. Musicians are also coming together at the festivals, mixing a spectrum of genres. It's very tangible and exciting."

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Jay Blakesberg shot Bob Weir; Shervin Lainez shot Aaron and Bryce Dessner

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Contents

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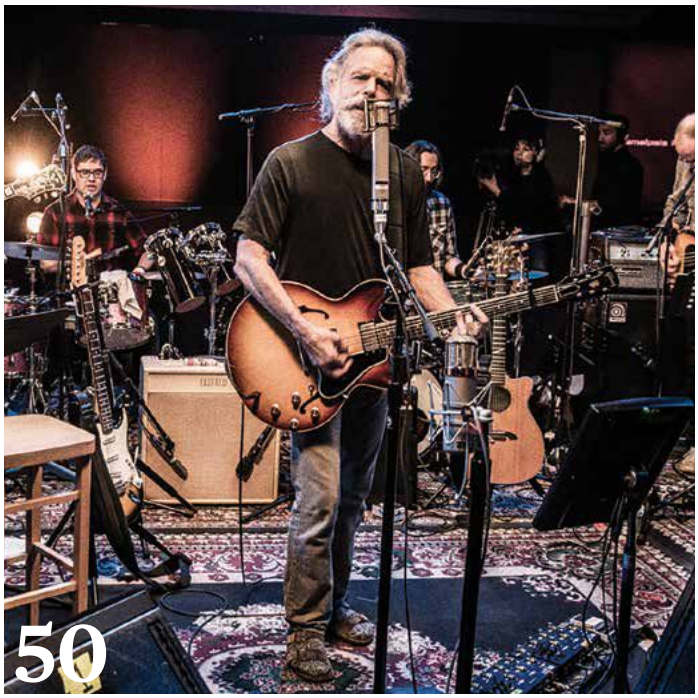

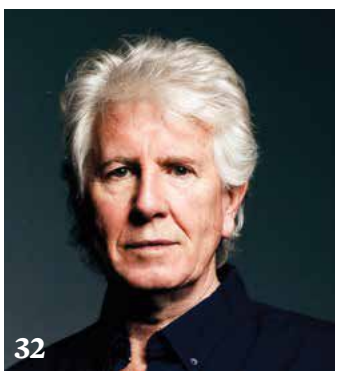

DEPARTMENTS

8 **Dear Relix**
Letters, comments and more

10 **The Beat**
Okeechobee Music & Arts Festival

11 **Festival Guide**
The first set of annual festival guide

13 **Soundcheck**
Live reviews and news from around the globe

18 **Behind The Scene**
Matrix

19 **My Page**
Sean Watkins on the dangers of differing opinions

20 **Tour Diary**
G. Love & Special Sauce

22 **On The Verge**
5 artists you should know about

24 **Spotlight**
Bombino, Marc Ford

26 **The Core**
Butch Trucks

27 **At Work**
Nolatet, Night Moves

28 **In Memoriam**
Chip Hooper

29 **Track By Track**
Peter Frampton's *Acoustic Classics*

30 **Exposed**
9:30 Club - The Book

32 **Interview**
Graham Nash

59 **Reviews**
Album reviews

76 **Parking Lot**
Relix.com highlights

80 **Parting Shots**
Esperanza Spalding

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FEATURES

50 Indie Is Dead
Few onlookers would have immediately pointed to Jerry Garcia as an obvious influence when **The National** first formed out of the indie art-underground. But over the past eight years, and especially as they geared up for the release of the all-star *Day of the Dead* tribute, they have become both unassuming heirs to the Dead's storied songbook and harbingers of interfaith indie-jam cool. Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** spent time with National guitarists and lifelong collaborators **Aaron** and **Bryce Dessner** as they put the final touches on their much-anticipated tribute to a genre-defining American band—and finds out how The National emerged at the forefront of the glimmering Grateful Dead world.

47 Pennsylvania Dreaming
Steve Kimock was synonymous with the "Bay Area sound" for decades, but in 2002, the guitarist returned home to Pennsylvania and formed a close musical bond with his teenage son, drummer **John Morgan**. As the elder Kimock prepared to relocate back to the San Francisco area a few months ago, he spent time crafting a deeply personal solo album that also functions as his parting gift to the Keystone State. Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** caught up with Kimock as he ushers in his intimate release with a new band and new address.

45 Déjà Vu All Over Again
The Wild Feathers are an anomaly in today's ego-mad pop world, crafting truly collaborative populist records that are able to squeeze true feeling out of American rock clichés. After overcoming some early label obstacles and barnstorming the country like their classic-rock forefathers, the fresh-faced Nashville, Tenn. quartet are out to redefine their own rock-and-roll hydra with their sophomore album, *Lonely Is a Lifetime*. And, as **Jim Farber** finds, they've brought the spirit of Gram Parson along for the ride.

43 Explosions in the Wilderness
Explosions in the Sky are Austin, Texas' foremost ambassadors of instrumental rock—a seemingly faceless band of sonic journeymen who draw as much inspiration from *2001: A Space Odyssey* as they do traditional indie-rock motifs. Yet, when it came time to write their seventh studio album *The Wilderness*, Explosions decided to let go of their old habits and allow new methods to sift in as part of an attempt to throw muscle memory to the wind. **Emily Zemler** walks us through their wild recording process.

40 Dropping Some MSG
John Popper has lived a true rock-and-roll life, sucking and blowing his way from a "straight F-student" to a New Year's Eve headliner at "The World's Music Famous Arena." His journey hasn't always been easy—Popper has struggled with his obesity and his longtime band **Blues Traveler** has faced more than its share of obstacles, but it's certainly proven to be entertaining. In this exclusive excerpt from his new autobiography, written with *Relix* Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick**, Popper revisits Blues Traveler's fabled first show at Madison Square Garden and explains how dreams can still come true even when everything goes wrong.

38 The Deadologists
Deadheads come from all walks of life and—as Contributing Editor **Jesse Jarnow** will be the first to tell you—have all sorts of academic degrees to their names. While researching the history of psychedelic America for his new thumb *Heads*, Jarnow traveled to New Mexico to attend an annual academic gathering of some of the foremost scholars studying the Dead's sunshine daydream. Here, a few of the brightest Deadheads around share their thoughts on the long, strange trip.

35 Rising in Reverse
Lake Street Dive burst out of seemingly nowhere—in reality the Berklee College of Music—with their stripped-down, jazz-club reimagining of a Jackson 5 classic and have quickly became a force on the modern-soul circuit. But, as they prove to Assistant Editor **Matt Inman**, the four members of Lake Street Dive won't let traditional genre-boundaries place them in a corner. So it's no surprise that their new Dave Cobb-produced record *Side Pony* not only showcases the group's proven R&B chops, but also their eclectic tastes—including a welcome detour into disco.

Jay Blakesberg (Bob Weir & Co.)

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Dear Relix

Here's what readers are talking about online and offline

Paul Kantner with the "next generation" of Jefferson Starship

DEAR RELIX

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JEFFERSON AIRPLANE'S FINAL FLIGHT

On January 28, Jefferson Airplane co-founder and Jefferson Starship guiding force Paul Kantner passed away due to multiple organ failure and septic shock following a heart attack. He was 74. Kantner helped form the Airplane in 1965 after meeting Marty Balin at the Drinking Gourd in San Francisco. In a strange turn of events, Signe Toly Anderson—Jefferson Airplane's original female vocalist, who left the group in 1966 after the release of their debut album—died the same day. Jefferson Starship, a band that Kantner resurrected in the early '90s, have confirmed that they will continue to tour without their longtime leader.

A great and sorrowfully underrated songwriter. And, in many ways, the mastermind of Jefferson Airplane. A revolutionary and a visionary, and now—finally—his mind has left his body. Thanks for so much great music and may the four winds blow you safely home. *Bodhi Heeren via Jambands.com*

Starship has launched. RIP, Paul. Thanks for the memories.

Sunfighter via Jambands.com

THE JOYFUL NOISE ENDURES

In advance of their new, self-produced record, Let Me Get By, *Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi sat with* Relix *Editor-in-Chief Dean Budnick for our January_February cover story. The musical couple and their bandmates discussed a variety of topics—from their new lineup to David Bowie's final release—and Trucks used the occasion to reveal a recent health scare, when he discovered a benign tumor on his spine.*

I saw them at the Apollo Theater and just listened to the album today. It doesn't get any better than this band these days. Derek is effortlessly good and Susan has never sounded better. The collaboration of the entire band on this project is so evident and so spot on.

Chuck via Relix.com

TODD NANCE MOVES ON

On February 9, shortly after the 30th anniversary of Widespread Panic's first concert and just hours before their hometown performance at Athens, Ga.'s Classic Center, a band representative confirmed to Relix *that Duane Trucks would be the group's drummer moving forward. Though Trucks has sat behind the skins with the group since the fall of 2014, founding Panic drummer Todd Nance performed with the band in early February during their Panic en la Playa event. The drummer had taken a leave of absence from the group due to undisclosed personal reasons, but he toured throughout the Southeast with his Todd Nance & Friends project during that time. Fansite PanicStream published a tweet, which has since been deleted, that captured an Instagram direct message from bassist Dave Schools reading, "It was not an easy decision. Ultimately, it was his choice. Onward."*

As with all great bands, it is about the sum being greater than its parts! Sometimes the parts change to make a greater sum! If you get confused, listen to the music play and, sometimes, if we are lucky, the music will play the band! It cannot be explained! Be there and just let it happen! *Caroline Loeb via Relix.com*

Loved Todd and wish him the best. That said, I have loved the energy Trucks brings to shows.

Panic Fan via Relix.com

What the hell! Widespread Panic was starting to sound like Widespread Panic again. You can't replace that groove that they have cultivated for the last 30 years. What a shame.

Willie Weeks via Jambands.com

It's so sad that what was once Panic has turned into an Allman Brothers knockoff. Such a shame. Nothing will ever touch the Panic of the late '90s-early 2000s. Jimmy is no replacement for Mikey, and Trucks can keep on trucking with the Allmans, as far as I'm concerned. Wishing Todd the best of luck. Here's to the Panic of old! You'll never be forgotten.

Forever Mikey via Jambands.com

FAN PHOTO

Widespread Panic welcomes some local friends to the big stage at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival on April 30, 2015. Photo by Alexandria Smith, Alexandria E. Photography.

Want to be published in *Relix*? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to the Facebook Photo Contest app on our Facebook page. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from a group of 10 finalists that received the most votes.

INSTAPRINT

Super Bowl 50 took place at Santa Clara, Calif.'s Levi's Stadium in February, with the Denver Broncos ultimately defeating the Carolina Panthers. Throughout the week, various events, musical and non-musical, took place around the city, and longtime Bay Area resident Bob Weir got in on the action. First, the guitarist joined his Dead & Company bandmate John Mayer during his solo show, and then he took the stage with Lukas Nelson and Dave Matthews Band's Rashawn Ross at the Wheels Up party on Super Bowl Eve. "What a blast and such an honor to share the stage with these guys," Ross (@vi_shawnieross) captioned this photo.

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BY JONNY PEPPERMAN // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KRAVITZ

There are bound to be a few surprises with any first-year festival, and the inaugural **Okeechobee Music & Arts Festival** wasn't an exception to that rule. Once the gates—or rather, the portals—opened, the South Florida gathering offered one surprise after another, but not in ways that one might have expected. By observing how fast cars moved through security and attendees found their campsites, or how easy it was to find food and water—and even, miraculously, a clean Porta-Potty—it would have been easy to mistake Okeechobee for Coachella, or other events with over a decade's worth of experience. However, even though Okeechobee felt like a natural extension of any number of modern, eclectic festivals, it was clear from the start that it also had a carefully defined identity.

From the intimate WobeeChobee Chai Lounge, tucked into a secluded grove of palm trees, to the sunny Aquachobee Beach Stage, complete with volleyball courts, to Jungle 51, a spaceship-like late-night area, the site managed to incorporate a huge variety of settings—all with distinct characters and vibes that coexisted within the same locale. Onsite, a barber giving professional cuts across from a group session at Yogachobee just seemed to make perfect sense. And, of course, the performers were the stars throughout the weekend. **Ween**, **Deer Tick**, **Grace Potter**, **The London Souls** and **Jason Isbell** all delivered standout daytime sets, while **Lotus** proved that they could get a massive crowd grooving, even without their trademark light show and usual late-night juice. At one point, **Seth** and **Scott Avett**, **Tom Morello** and **Eric Krasno** all joined **Mumford & Sons** during their headlining slot to slam through the Kinks' "You Really Got Me."

The Saturday night PoWoW! would have given any Bonnaroo SuperJam a serious run for its money. Onstage, **John Oates** directed a group of artists that represented every facet of the festival's varied lineup. The Meters' **George Porter Jr.** performed a traditional NOLA rendition of "Iko Iko" just a few minutes after Arcade Fire's **Win Butler** paid homage to the late David Bowie with covers of "Fame" and "Rebel Rebel." R&B singer **Miguel**, the band's de facto frontman and host, led the ensemble through a show-stopping cover of Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," although his earlier surprise of Drake's "Hotline Bling" may have been the night's highlight.

As a treat for those who stayed up late into the night, **Skrillex** came straight from his headlining set to put on a Stratocaster and join the band and **Marcus Mumford** for a politically charged take on The Clash's "Rock the Casbah" during the PoWoW!'s encore.

Festival Guide: Set I

COMPILED BY ROB SLATER

It's officially spring and El Niño has, hopefully, loosened its grip over the Pacific, which can only mean one thing–festival season is in full swing. Once again, we are proud to present the first installment of our annual festival guide. (Check out The Beat and Soundcheck sections in this issue for a look at a few world-class 2016 festivals that are already in the rearview mirror.) Festival lineups are current as of press time and we will continue to update them on relix.com/festivals. If you see an (R) next to a listing, then be sure to visit us at the *Relix* booth onsite.

Sweetwater 420 Fest

Mission Creek Festival
4/5-10 // Iowa City, IA
Kurt Vile & The Violators, Alison Bechdel, Kevin Smith, Marc Maron, Deer Tick, Faust, Saul Williams, The Joy Formidable, PHOX, YACHT, Son Lux, Gary Wilson, Slum Village, more
missionfreak.com

Euphoria Festival
4/7-10 // Austin, TX
Bassnectar, STS9, Lettuce, Above & Beyond, Dillon Francis, Juicy J, GRiZ, Tycho, Cherub, Jai Wolf, Lil Dicky, Andrew Luce, Waka Flocka Flame, Crizzly, Cream Cheese Accident, more
euphoriafest.com

Rhythm N Blooms Festival
4/8-10 // Knoxville, TN
Robert Randolph & the Family Band, Mutemath, The Mavericks, The Black Cadillacs, Old 97's, The Lone Bellow, G. Love & Special Sauce, American Aquarium, Green River Ordinance, more
rhythmnbloomsfest.com

(R) Wanee Music Festival
4/14-16 // Live Oak, FL
Widespread Panic, Gov't Mule, Gregg Allman, Umphrey's McGee, Hot Tuna w/ Steve Kimock, Les Brers, Jaimoe's Jasssz Band, Billy & The Kids, North Mississippi Allstars w/ Anders Osborne, more
waneefestival.com

Old Settler's Music Festival
4/14-17 // Driftwood, TX
Dawes, Del McCoury Band, Rodney Crowell, The Wood Brothers, Hayes Carll, Bob Schneider, Sarah Jarosz, The Milk Carton Kids, Deer Tick, The Jayhawks, David Ramirez, The Suffers, Shinyribs, Jerry Douglas Presents The Earls of Leicester, more
oldsettlersmusicfest.org

Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival
4/15-17; 4/22-24 // Indio, CA
LCD Soundsystem, Guns N' Roses, Calvin Harris, Courtney Barnett, Ellie Goulding, Sufjan Stevens, The Kills, Foals, Of Monsters and Men, Lord Huron, Chris Stapleton, Gary Clark Jr., The Arcs, more
coachella.com

Tortuga Music Festival
4/15-17 // Fort Lauderdale, FL
Blake Shelton, Tim McGraw, Dierks Bentley, Thomas Rhett, Sam Hunt, Kip Moore, Billy Currington, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Michael Franti & Spearhead, Elle King, Randy Houser, Old Dominion, more
tortugamusicfestival.com

Norman Music Festival
4/21-23 // Norman, OK
Cloud Nothings, Nikki Lane, Small Black, Gazzo, Open Mike Eagle, Nobunny, The Coathangers, Power Trip, Samantha Crain, Skating Polly, Bayonne, Woozy, Tallows, Jacob Tovar and the Saddle Tramps, Crystal Vision, more normanmusicfestival.com

Some Kind of Jam 11
4/22-24 // Schuylkill Haven, PA
The New Mastersounds, Mike Dillon Band, RAQ, The Big Dirty, Jason Ricci & The Bad Kind, Banditos, Black Masala, Gang Of Thieves, Captain Green, more
jibberjazz.com

(R) Sweetwater 420 Fest
4/22-24 // Atlanta, GA
Kid Rock, Ben Harper & The Innocent Criminals, Bastille, Ludacris, Cypress Hill, Disco Biscuits, AWOLNATION, The Roots, Michael Franti & Spearhead, Atmosphere, Manchester Orchestra, The Word, more
sweetwater420fest.com

New Orleans Jazz Festival
4/22-24; 4/28-5/1 // New Orleans, LA
Stevie Wonder, Pearl Jam, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Neil Young + Promise of the Real, Snoop Dogg, Paul Simon, Steely Dan, Beck, Van Morrison, Grace Potter, My Morning Jacket, Nick Jonas, J. Cole, Flo Rida, Gary Clark Jr., Ms. Lauryn Hill, Bonnie Raitt, more
nojazzfest.com

Suwannee River Jam
4/27-30 // Live Oak, FL
Lynyrd Skynyrd, Chase Rice, Big & Rich, Clay Walker, Chris Janson, LOCASH, Big Smo, more
suwanneeriverjam.com

MerleFest
4/28-5/1 // Wilkesboro, NC
John Prine, Old Crow Medicine Show, Jason Isbell, Dave Rawlings Machine, Brandi Carlile, Steep Canyon Rangers, The Wood Brothers, Sam Bush Band, Tim O'Brien, Jerry Douglas, Peter Rowan, more
merlefest.org

M3 Rock Festival
4/29-30 // Columbia, MD
Vince Neil, Kix, Britny Fox, Lynch Mob, Tesla, Night Ranger, Cinderella's Tom Keifer, Quiet Riot, Slaughter, Y&T, FireHouse, Adler, more
m3rock.webs.com

Beale Street Music Festival
4/29-5/1 // Memphis, TN
Neil Young + Promise and the Real, Beck, Paul Simon, Weezer, Modest Mouse, Grace Potter, Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats, The Arcs, Barenaked Ladies, Trampled By Turtles, Courtney Barnett, more
memphisinmay.org

Further Future
4/29-5/1 // Las Vegas, NV
Nicolas Jaar, Four Tet, Lee Burridge, Leftfield, Caribou, Easy Star All-Stars, DJ Tennis, Kid Koala, The Pharcyde, Dixon, Kimball Collins, &ME, Lambert, Low Leaf, Elderbrook, Pedro Aguiar, Satori, more
furtherfuture.com

LEVITATION Festival
4/29-5/1 // Austin, TX
Brian Wilson, Ween, Animal Collective, Caribou, Flying Lotus, Slowdive, Courtney Barnett, Sleep, The Arcs, Nicolas Jaar, Brian Jonestown Massacre, The Black Angels, Super Furry Animals, Ty Segall, more
levitation-austin.com

Stagecoach Music Festival
4/29-5/1 // Indio, CA
Eric Church, Carrie Underwood, Luke Bryan, Sam Hunt, Chris Young, Emmylou Harris, Eric Paslay, The Band Perry, Joe Nichols, John Fogerty, Chris Stapleton, Little Big Town, Dustin Lynch, The Doobie Brothers, A Thousand Horses, more
stagecoachfestival.com

Moonstone Music Festival
4/30-5/1 // Orlando, FL
KISS, Def Leppard, The Flaming Lips, Evanescence, AWOLNATION, Best Coast, Buckcherry, Wolf Alice, The Stone Foxes, Kansas, The White Buffalo, Steel Panther, Girlpool, Vintage Trouble, more
moonstonemusicfestival.com

Welcome To Rockville
4/30-5/1 // Jacksonville, FL
Disturbed, Shinedown, 3 Doors Down, Rob Zombie, ZZ Top, Five Finger Death Punch, Megadeth, Lamb of God, Cypress Hill, Bring Me the Horizon, Bullet for My Valentine, more
welcometorockvillefestival.com

Carolina Rebellion
5/6-8 // Concord, NC
The Scorpions, ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd, 3 Doors Down, Sixx:A.M., Collective Soul, Pop Evil, Shinedown, Five Finger Death Punch, Lamb Of God, A Day to Remember, Megadeath, Anthrax, Alice Cooper, Rob Zombie, Deftones, more
carolinarebellion.com

Joshua Tree Music Festival
5/12-15 // Joshua Tree, CA
Dumpstaphunk, Tyler Bryant & The Shakedown, The Main Squeeze, Hamsa Lila, Dam Funk, Wondem, All Good Funk Alliance, Trevor Green, The Accidentals, Todo Mundo, Stone Soul, Bearcoon, more
joshuatreemusicfestival.com

Shaky Knees Music Festival
5/13-15 // Atlanta, GA
Florence + The Machine, Jane's Addiction, My Morning Jacket, The 1975, Walk The Moon, The Decemberists, Deftones, Young The Giant, Foals, The Head and the Heart, At The Drive-In, The Kills, Silversun Pickups, Explosions in the Sky, Cold War Kids, more
shakykneesfestival.com

98.9 The Rock's ROCKFEST
5/14 // Kansas City, MO
Disturbed, Ghost, Seether, Sixx:A.M., Trivium, Jackyl, Sevendust, Escape The Fate, Like A Storm, The Veer Union, Red Sun Rising, Pop Evil, Drowning Pool, more
rockfestkc.com

Electric Daisy Carnival
5/14-15 // New York, NY
Afrojack, Dada Life, David Guetta, Dillon Francis, DJ Snake, Eric Prydz, Kaskade, Party Thieves, Zedd, more
newyork.electricdaisycarnival.com

Northern Invasion
5/14-15 // Somerset, WI
Disturbed, Rob Zombie, Korn, Shinedown, A Day to Remember, Bring Me the Horizon, Seether, Lamb Of God, Ghost, Sixx:A.M., Pop Evil, Sevendust, Clutch, HELLYEAH, Black Stone Cherry, more
northerninvasion.com

Moogfest
5/19-22 // Durham, NC
ODESZA, Miike Snow, Grimes, Gary Numan, Explosions in the Sky, Blood Orange, Reggie Watts, The Orb, Skepta, Sun Ra, Laurie Anderson, Bob Moses, more
www.moogfest.com

Orange Blossom Jamboree
5/19-22 // Brooksville, FL
Shak Nasti, Come Back Alice, The Applebutter Express, Bobby Lee Rodgers Trio, Beeb$ and Her Money Maker$, Juke, Ben Prestage, Displace, S.P.O.R.E., Crazy Fingers, more
orangeblossomjamboree.com

(R) Hangout Music Festival
5/20-22 // Gulf Shores, AL
The Weeknd, Calvin Harris, Alabama Shakes, Florence + The Machine, Ellie Goulding, Lenny Kravitz, Flume, Haim, Cage The Elephant, Panic! At the Disco, Walk The Moon, Leon Bridges, Grimes, The Chainsmokers, Jason Isbell, Miike Snow, Run The Jewels, more
hangoutmusicfest.com

Rock'n Derby
5/20-22 // Schaghticoke, NY
Five Finger Death Punch, Lamb Of God, A Day to Remember, Anthrax, Chevy Metal, Shinedown, Coheed and Cambria, Megadeth, Clutch, Parkway Drive, Wolfmother, Scott Stapp, Pop Evil, Red Sun Rising, Halestorm, more
rocknderby.com

Rock on the Range
5/20-22 // Columbus, OH
Red Hot Chili Peppers, Disturbed, At the Drive-In, Rob Zombie, Five Finger Death Punch, Shinedown, A Day to Remember, Bring Me the Horizon, Megadeath, Lamb Of God, Pennywise, more
rockontherange.com

Shaky Beats Music Festival
5/20-22 // Atlanta, GA
Major Lazer, ODESZA, Big Gigantic, Nas, Chromeo, Cherub, ZHU, Jai Wolf, Small Black, AlunaGeorge, Yeasayer, Trippy Turtle, STRFKR, A$AP Ferg, Carnage, more
shakybeatsfestival.com

Lightning in a Bottle
5/25-30 // Bradley, CA
Chet Faker, Grimes, Jamie xx, Moderat, Big Gigantic, Hundred Waters, Ibeyi, Emancipator Ensemble, Nahko and Medicine for the People, Rubblebucket, more
lightninginabottle.org

(R) DelFest
5/26-29 // Cumberland, MD
The Del McCoury Band, The Travelin' McCourys, Tedeschi Trucks Band, Greensky Bluegrass, Railroad Earth, Bruce Hornsby & The Noisemakers, Sam Bush Band, Yonder Mountain String Band, The Wood Brothers, The Infamous Stringdusters feat. Nicki Bluhm, Jerry Douglas Presents The Earls of Leicester, Keller Williams, more
delfest.com

Maryland Deathfest
5/26-29 // Baltimore, MD
Testament, Doom, Exciter, Venom, Bongzilla, The Haunted, Hail Of Bullets, Paradise Lost, Repulsion, Earth, Nuclear Assault, Destroyer 666, Novembers Doom, Jungle Rot, more
deathfests.com

Punk Rock Bowling & Music Festival Las Vegas 2016
5/26-30 // Las Vegas, NV
Flag, Descendents, Flogging Molly, The Exploited, Buzzcocks, Face To Face, Subhumans, Millencolin, Dag Nasty, The Bronx, Dillinger Four, Strung Out, Youth Brigade, The Dwarves, Off With Their Heads, more
punkrockbowling.com

Boston Calling Music Festival
5/27-29 // Boston, MA
Sia, Disclosure, Robyn, ODESZA, Sufjan Stevens, Haim, Miike Snow, Courtney Barnett, City and Colour, Elle King, The Front Bottoms, BØRNS, more
bostoncalling.com

BottleRock Napa Valley
5/27-29 // Napa Valley, CA
Stevie Wonder, Florence + The Machine, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Lenny Kravitz, Grouplove, Death Cab for Cutie, Walk The Moon, The Lumineers, Rodrigo Y Gabriela, Ziggy Marley, Cold War Kids, Gogol Bordello, more
bottlerocknapavalley.com

California Roots Music & Arts Festival
5/27-29 // Monterey, CA
Damian Marley, Slightly Stoopid, Rebelution, Atmosphere, Stephen Marley, Tribal Seeds, Michael Franti & Spearhead, The Expendables, The Green, Stick Figure, Tarrus Riley, Katchafire, Protoje, Gondwana, more
californiarootsfestival.com

Country 500
5/27-29 // Daytona, FL
Luke Bryan, Jason Aldean, Florida Georgia Line, Kid Rock, Lady Antebellum, Willie Nelson, Little Big Town, Lee Brice, Tyler Farr, Trace Adkins, Chris Stapleton, Dwight Yoakam, more
country500.com

Dark Star Jubilee
5/27-29 // Thornville, OH
Dark Star Orchestra, Yonder Mountain String Band, Hot Tuna, Leftover Salmon, Steve Kimock & Friends, The Wailers, Melvin Seals and DSO, Rumpke Mountain Boys, Like Father, Like Son, Jeff Mattson, Owsley County, Matt Reynolds, more
darkstarjubilee.com

Rocklahoma
5/27-29 // Pryor, OK
Scorpions, Disturbed, Rob Zombie, Five Finger Death Punch, Chevelle, 3 Doors Down, Megadeth, Bullet for My Valentine, Sixx:A.M., Pop Evil, Collective Soul, Red Sun Rising, The Sword, Citizen Zero, Last In Line, more
rocklahoma.com

(R) Summer Camp Music Festival
5/27-29 // Chillicothe, IL
moe., Umphrey's McGee, STS9, Thievery Corporation, The Roots, Emancipator, EOTO, Everyone Orchestra, Greensky Bluegrass, Keller Williams, Lettuce, Savoy, Mudcrutch, Yonder Mountain String Band, more
summercampfestival.com

Summer Camp

Sasquatch! Music Festival
5/27-30 // George, WA
Florence + the Machine, The Cure, Disclosure, Major Lazer, Alabama Shakes, A$AP Rocky, M83, Sufjan Stevens, Grimes, Leon Bridges, Chet Faker, Jamie xx, Purity Ring, Tycho, Mac DeMarco, Kurt Vile & The Violators, Lord Huron, more
sasquatchfestival.com

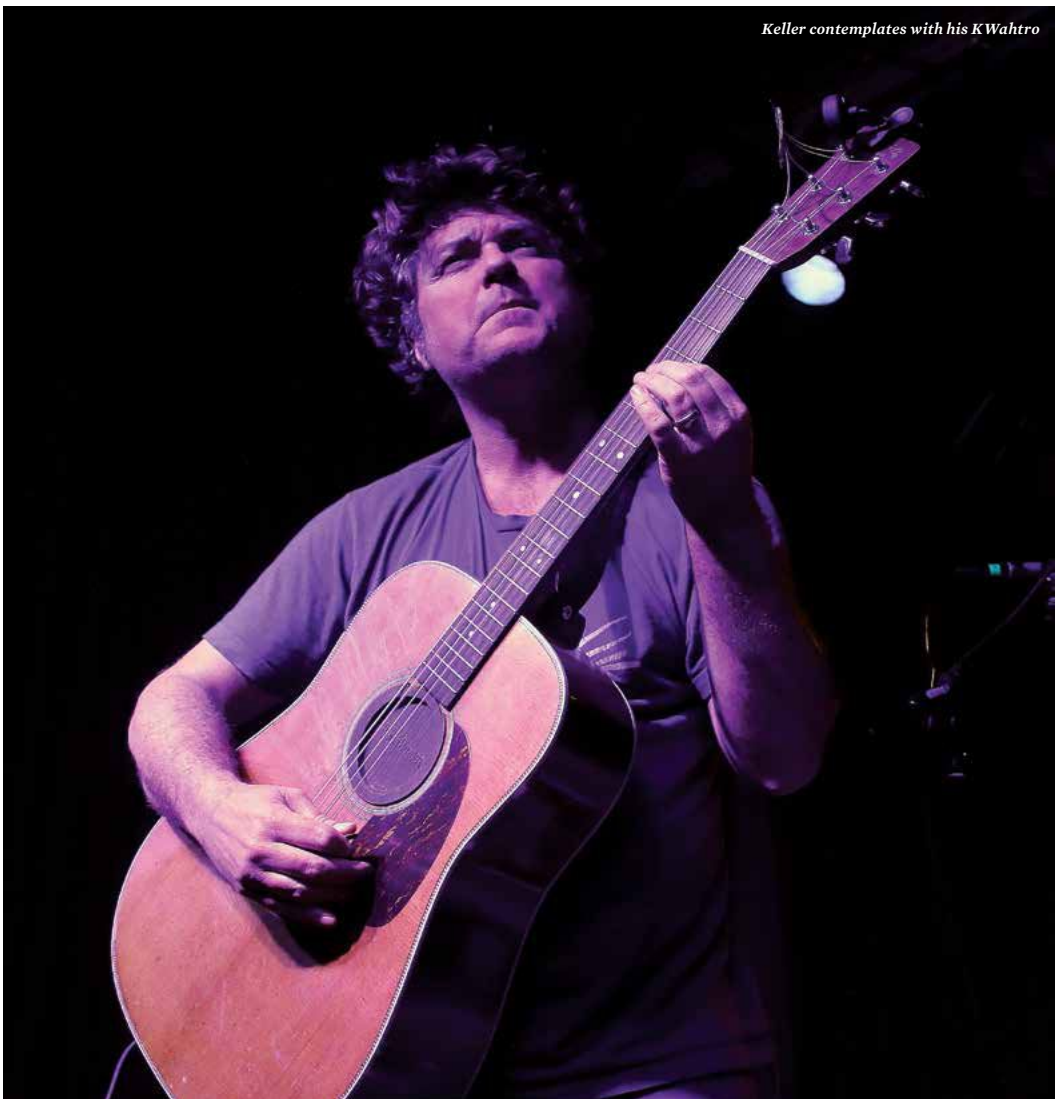
Movement Electronic Music Festival
5/28-30 // Detroit, MI
Kraftwerk, Caribou, Boys Noize, Adam Beyer, Guy Gerber, DJ Pierre, Four Tet, Tale Of Us, Matador, Magda, Carl Craig, Eddie Fowkles, John Digweed, Loco Dice, Justin Martin, more
movement.us

River City Rockfest 2016
5/29 // San Antonio, TX
Disturbed, Scorpions, Megadeth, Bullet for My Valentine, HELLYEAH, Sixx:A.M., Pop Evil, Sevendust, P.O.D., The Sword, Texas Hippie Coalition, Hatebreed, DevilDriver, Red Sun Rising, Avatar, Wild Throne, more
rivercityrockfest.com

jambands.com Need We Say More? FOR UP-TO-THE-MINUTE REVIEWS AND NEWS, PLEASE GO TO WWW.JAMBANDS.COM

Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK



Keller contemplates with his KWahtro

John Patrick Gatta

THE KELLER WILLIAMS KWAHTRO

BEACHLAND BALLROOM
CLEVELAND
MARCH 3

With an inexhaustible muse and self-proclaimed creative ADD, **Keller Williams** has tackled rock, folk, bluegrass, reggae, EDM, funk and (Grateful) gospel. While much of it has been done as a one-man band with looping technology, he's also employed a variety of recording and onstage collaborators including The Keels, McCourys and The String Cheese Incident.

Williams introduced his latest and arguably best musical formation at the start of the new year, **The Keller Williams KWahtro**, which played an improv-heavy, 135-minute set at a packed Beachland Ballroom in Cleveland on March 3. Featuring previous collaborators **Gibb Droll** (guitar) and **Rodney Holmes** (drums) plus newer associate **Danton Boller** (double bass), the acoustic quartet solidly blended the hyperkinetic energy of Keller's solo side with a classic jamband aesthetic that featured fluid arrangements and improvisation. Most important, the band was never indulgent in its sonic explorations.

The 20-song set had unending melodic hooks, mesmerizing grooves and exciting revelations when the KWahtro's seamless interplay moved through "Moving Sidewalk," "Baby Mama" and "Cheaper by Bail." Boller provided a metronomic deep groove while Holmes acted like a human 808 drum machine with a deft touch for disco, funk, drum and bass, breakbeat, house, reggae and soca. Together, they provided a foundation of danceable rhythms, with "Victory Song," "Open Close" and new number "Six Pack" being particularly exemplary. That foundation allowed Keller to color the songs with his inventive ways (i.e. "Mantra" or adding a line from Talking Heads' "Swamp" to "Stuck in the Middle" before transitioning into "Makin' It Rain"). Droll knocked out one solo after another without wasting a single note, during show highlights "Best Feeling" and Phish's "Birds of a Feather."

Near the end of the night, Keller returned to form and played solo versions of "Doobie in My Pocket" and "Cookies." Of course, it wouldn't be a Keller show without a Grateful Dead cover so it was no surprise that a beatific "Bird Song" segued into the Phish tune. The set ended with another nod, Morphine's "Buena." The band members were having such a good time weaving new musical tapestries that "Breathe" and "The Drop," written on the onstage setlist, were nixed in favor of an (always) exuberant "Freaker by the Speaker" for the encore.

John Patrick Gatta

LET THERE BE SONGS TO FILL THE AIR

using the power of music to heal

Music Never Stops: the Tyler Seaman Foundation supports music therapy programs. Our first project is "Tyler's Room," a space for teens and young adults at Mount Sinai Beth Israel in New York City.

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THE TYLER SEAMAN FOUNDATION

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www.tylersmusicroom.org

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KAMASI WASHINGTON

WEBSTER HALL
NEW YORK
FEBRUARY 24

On a rainy winter night in New York, **Kamasi Washington** limped to center stage in a walking boot, leaning on an ornate cane. His saxophone in tow, Washington overlooked the sold-out crowd inside a hot, hazy Webster Hall, and his seven-piece band kicked into "Change of the Guard." Much can be said about "Change of the Guard," the opening track on Washington's odyssey-length LP, aptly titled *The Epic*. The song is a 12-minute journey of lush garden grooves that sound like they could spill over the tops of the Himalayas—it's an ideal show-opener. But thematically, "Change of the Guard" does well to sum up Washington's position in the modern jazz world.

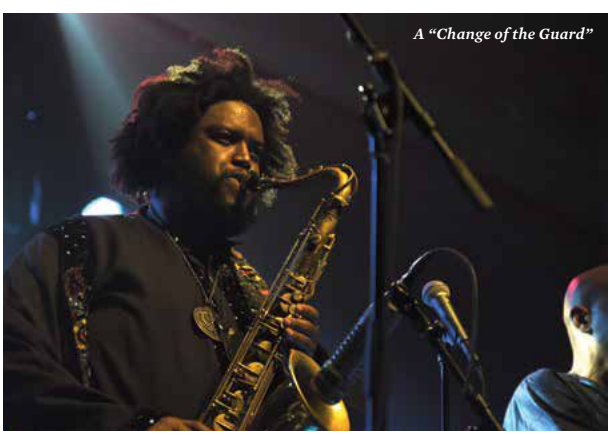
The 35-year-old band-leader openly refutes the word "jazz" in reference to his music, and it's easy to understand why. Jazz, as a genre, covers a broad range of styles. Washington and his band, collectively known as the **West Coast Get Down**, explored every corner of the jazz spectrum over their seven-song Webster Hall set—from swinging drums underneath walking basslines with boisterous horn solos to the groovier, more melodic fusion of groups like Weather Report and Mahavishnu Orchestra. As much as he might want to distance himself from it, Washington has a place on jazz's chaotic timeline. Few, if any, players have reinforced jazz music's cultural relevance in the 21st century the way he has. He may have truly made his mark in early 2015 with his work on Kendrick Lamar's masterful *To Pimp a Butterfly*, but Washington truly blossoms during his headlining engagements, as remarkably diverse crowds experience his music firsthand.

Although the studio tracks on *The Epic* have grandiose orchestral and choral arrangements, very little of that spiritual aura was lost when the songs were stripped down for this septet formation. The band also invited Kamasi's father, **Rickey Washington**, out to play flute on "Henrietta Our Hero," a gorgeous gospel number, which showcased vocalist **Patrice Quinn**'s range. The elder Washington remained onstage for the remainder of the show. From the look in his eyes as he watched his son pour his soul into each tenor sax solo, you could see that, at least in the Washington family, there was another changing of the guard taking place.

Two of the night's funkiest tunes were written by other West Coast Get Down members. **Miles Mosley** played his upright bass through a bubbly envelope filter and sang lead vocals on his unrelentingly groovy composition "Abraham." Keyboardist and prolific keytar player **Brandon Coleman** later led the band through his own "Giant Feelings," which contained a full-band tease of the *Ghostbusters* theme.

An entire review could be devoted solely to the band's two drummers, **Ronald Bruner Jr.** and **Tony Austin**, who challenge conception as to how rhythmically aligned two human beings can be on separate drum sets. During their drum solo—or "conversation," as Kamasi called it—the two drummers perfectly increased and decreased tempo as if they were a machine and someone was turning a dial.

All of this word-class musicianship came to a head on the rollicking ballad "The Rhythm Changes." Wherever Kamasi Washington belongs in the annals of jazz music, consider this song, and this concert's final verse, belted by Quinn over massive crescendos: "Our love, our beauty, our genius/ Our work, our triumph, our glory/ Won't worry what happened before me/ I'm here." ***Matt Nestor***



A "Change of the Guard"

Matt Nestor

UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA

IRVING PLAZA
NEW YORK
FEBRUARY 20

On the final night of their winter tour through North America, **Unknown Mortal Orchestra** didn't show any signs of road fatigue as they blew away a sold-out Irving Plaza in New York City with a vibrant and surprisingly jammy performance.

UMO frontman and guitarist **Ruban Nielson** is an admitted music-gear

Ruban Neilson rides the rail

Julia Drummond

nerd, always searching for the combination that will produce the perfect sound in the studio, and that meticulous approach pays off in his live performances as well. From the first few notes of the concert—a short guitar intro that perfectly imitated the timbre of a plucked sitar—Nielson showed that he was in complete control of his sound, and his bandmates followed accordingly.

The band didn't waste any time before dropping straight into their pocket, jumping into "Like Acid Rain," a track from their most recent release, last year's *Multi-Love*, which was a shiny, beautiful and strikingly executed mess—in the best possible meaning of the word. UMO's live show reflects this, providing an enjoyably loose aura, while also giving the impression that every note—even in the solos—was planned out ahead of time.

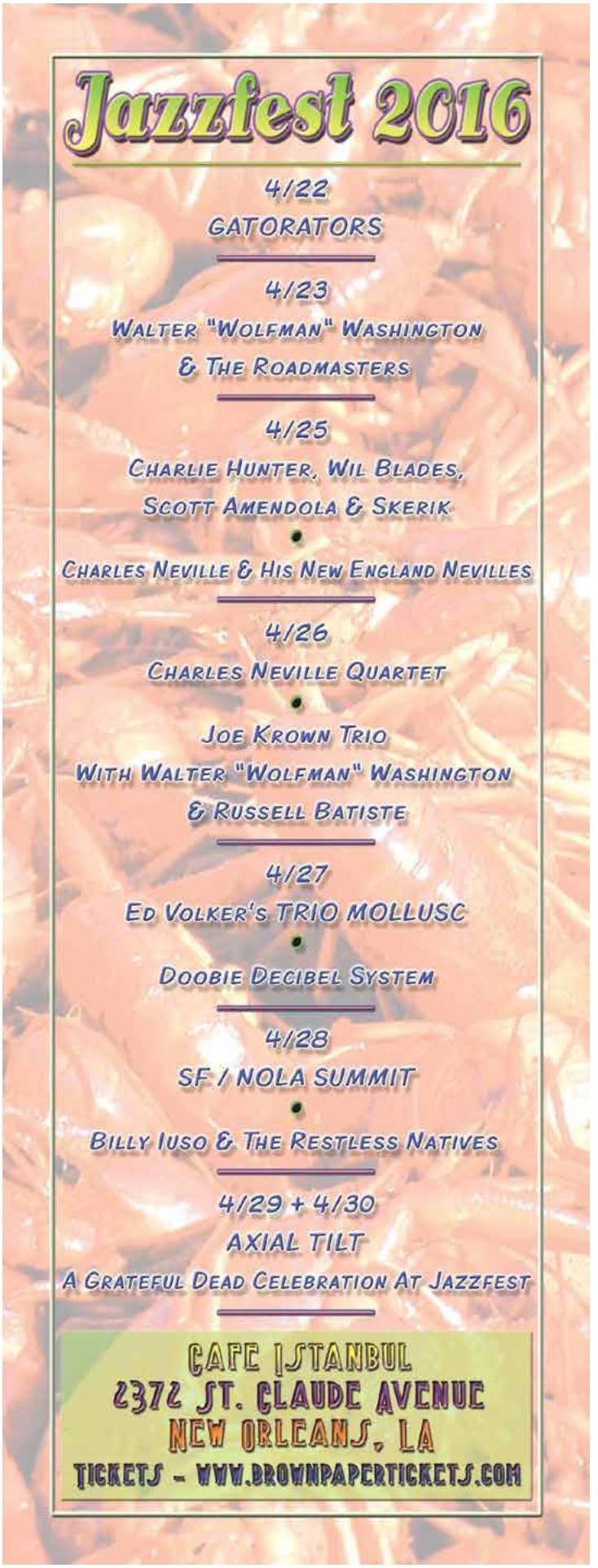
Abandoning the newer material for a spell, the band showcased two songs from their previous albums. First came "From the Sun," the opening track from *II*, which shows off both drummer **Riley Geare**'s knack for providing a more than solid backbone and Neilson's soloing skills, understated on the band's studio work. After a run of "How Can You Luv Me," a song off their self-titled debut, Geare followed Nielson's lead with his own solo, a lesson in power and nuance, which then moved into the modal keyboard riff of "Ur Life One Night."

The set took off in the second half, as the band used the plodding groove of "So Good at Being in Trouble" to segue into a funky keyboard and drum breakdown that went into the fan favorite "Swim and Sleep (Like a Shark)." As if the crowd wasn't already fully immersed in the show, during the ensuing "Stage or Screen," Nielson made his way into the audience—close enough to the back of the venue that he could have called for a drink from the bar—leading the sea of fans in singing one of his many earworm choruses.

Neilson then brought out the song that initially jumpstarted UMO's fame, "Ffunny Ffrends," effortlessly recreating the spastic guitar solo from the studio version before keyboardist **Quincy McCrary** turned the groove into a piano-driven swing (à la Elton John's "Crocodile Rock") that slowly quieted down as the crowd took up the chorus a cappella style.

After rounding out the set with the ethereal anthem "Multi-Love," the band returned to the stage for a two-song encore with an added horn section of saxophone and trumpet to fill out an already full sound. Contrasting the comparatively mild groove of "Necessary Evil" with the manic disco of "Can't Keep Checking My Phone," UMO closed out their tour doing what they do best: bringing a shuffle to the step and a smile to the face of everyone in the building.

Matt Inman



THE INFAMOUS STRINGDUSTERS

THE TROUBADOUR
WEST HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.
FEBRUARY 25

It was so hot inside the Troubadour on this February evening that even before **The Infamous Stringdusters** had taken the stage, the rear exit doors were wide open, letting in as much of the cooler night air as possible. These efforts proved futile after the Dusters emerged, ending a four-year absence from the City of Angels, to make their first appearance at the illustrious club.

The quintet's impeccable vocal harmonies supported surges of fiddle and guitar on the opening "Once You're Gone." **Andy Hall**'s Dobro work elicited constant awe, meriting apt comparisons to Jerry Douglas, the instrument's king. Hall's not alone, though, in his dexterity and taste, as his equally gifted mates spun out notes at dizzying rates, yet never lost the heart of the song. Even as they formed into pairs, or half-circles of musical conversation, the quintet was mindful not to dawdle, allowing the jams to migrate likewise between them. Whether passing the baton from **Travis Book** on double bass to **Jeremy Garrett**'s fiddle, then on to Hall as they did on "All That I Can Take," or taking aim at covers as diverse as U2's "In God's Country" and Jefferson Airplane's "Somebody to Love," the latter with the help of **Nicki Bluhm**, it was the collective, not the solo, that counted the most.

Supporting the band's latest, *Ladies and Gentlemen*, the ensemble brought out Della Mae's **Celia Woodsmith** for the high-heeled boot-stomp of "Old Whiskey Bottle," and **Aofie O'Donovan** on a gentle "Run to Heaven." It was Bluhm, though, whose sinewy slink on a duo of "Still the One" and her own "Little Too Late" who closed the first set that prompted one of the night's most raucous responses.

Midway through the second set, the Troubadour conceded and turned the air conditioning loose. It was more than symbolic, and downright necessary as Bluhm led a peaking "Listen." A pair of covers, the traditional "Deep Ellum Blues" and The Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," kept the throng in a mesmerized hold, before "Hillbillies" inspired guitarist **Andy Falco** and banjoist **Chris Pandolfi** to jump onto stage-front risers for the scorching finale. Only an emancipating encore of the Grateful Dead's "Deal" remained, and, at last, a chance to wipe off the sweat. ***Larson Sutton***

The Dusters' debut at the Troubadour

WINTERWONDER-GRASS

AVON, COLO.
FEBRUARY 19-21

As a festival, **WinterWonder-Grass**'s chief concern is the vibe. That's a necessity considering its location—two hours from Denver at 7,431 feet—as well as the winter dates, when highway closures are commonplace. If the atmosphere wasn't good, then the festival wouldn't have sold out four years in a row, and Bonfire Entertainment, which throws the event, wouldn't be investing in the California variation. The company handpicks musicians based on acoustic aptitude and, if it digs a particular sound, it doesn't have a problem inviting the same bands back. Hence, **Greensky Bluegrass** headlined two nights, alongside fellow returning favorites **Leftover Salmon**, **The Wood Brothers** and **Fruition**.

As expected, there was plenty of mingling between bands, led by a few individuals—chief among them was the mischievous **Larry Keel**, who curated a handful of sets and guested with others, including Leftover Salmon. Michigan-bred picker **Billy Strings** impressed with every note, whether solo or with others, like the rootsy, eight-piece **Dustbowl Revival.** Then there was **Andy Thorn**, Salmon's banjoist, who played the most of anyone over the course of the fest and still managed to make time to ski. Dobro player-at-large **Jay Starling** was so

The Cosmic Cowboy and Co.

ubiquitous, though, that Greensky even joked about it, confusing him with **Anders Beck** during one of their two sets.

Greensky turned in inspired performances both nights, playing through a handful of newer tunes, classics and varied covers, including Ween's "Your Party." Friday night was preceded by an incendiary Fruition set—see "Fire," with Keel and Thorn—so good, in fact, that Greensky dedicated "Demons" to the band later that night. Nothing beat Greensky's Saturday show, however, which featured guest **DJ Logic** on "Broke Mountain Breakdown," complete with an apt "Booty Jam (Bend Over)." Beck introduced his mixing friend, saying, "This is about the old ancient dichotomy: 'To twang, or to not.'"

Still, the ultimate festival presence was "Panama Red himself, the Cosmic Cowboy" **Peter Rowan**. Rowan played the role of bluegrass shaman, whether he was leading Fruition through Bill Monroe's "Walls of Time" or playing the songs he's famous for ("Midnight Moonlight," "Land of the Navajo," "Free Mexican Air Force"). Rowan carried a slight reggae theme throughout, which climaxed when he joined Salmon for Bob Marley's "Soul Shakedown Party." That song sandwiched Monroe's "Little Maggie," Flatt and Scrugg's "Hot Corn/Cold Corn" *and* the Grateful Dead staple "I Know You Rider," with lyrics changed to: "I know my mother wouldn't like to see me here/ Because she don't smoke reefer, she don't drink good beer."

It was an appropriate ad lib, considering WWG is also a beer festival. Come nightfall, there's always a well-boozed few in the crowd—just ask the dude who jumped onstage during The Wood Brothers set for the second year in a row. Despite

Courtney Armitage, Dylan Langille

his fail at crowd surfing, that set was nearly perfect, with a handful of tunes off of *Paradise* and some sing-along audience favorites ("Postcards from Hell," The Band's "Ophelia"). Nonetheless, it was a Jimmy Martin song that **Mandolin Orange** covered, with guest guitarist **Josh Stills**, that lingered most as the festival came to a close: "Be thankful your living/ Drink up and go home."
Kiran Herbert

SUNFLOWER BEAN

BOWERY BALLROOM
NEW YORK
FEBRUARY 25

Sunflower Bean sold out New York's Bowery Ballroom less than a week ahead of their late February headlining show. When the band took the stage to an adoring throng—and grinned at a room decorated with streamers and shimmery balloons—you could tell they were relishing their moment. This was an affirmative show, the sign of a much-buzzed-about band hitting a certain peak. This was a band breaking through, and knowing it.

The Brooklyn group's music sits in a Venn diagram that includes pulse-pounding indie rock, layered prog and metal-flecked power pop, with groovy jamband elements, psychedelia and the occasional punk jones. For some bands, that would become a messy hodgepodge—a confused sound more about positioned eclecticism than heart. Instead, Sunflower Bean sounds like itself, convincing you that songs like "Human Ceremony," "Easier Said," "2013" and "Tame Impala" all belong in the same wayward catalog—this is music ideally suited to moshing, rocking out or drifting off in a blissful daze at various moments. There are pretty, almost gossamer vocals and full-throated screams. Band members entered the crowd, reveling in the rumble of the bass and the clatter of the drums.

Sunflower Beam smashes genres with style

Bassist/vocalist **Julia Cumming**, guitarist/vocalist **Nick Kivlen** and drummer **Jacob Faber** load Sunflower Bean's genre-smashing style with overpowering charm. You could imagine them in an arena. You could picture this trio at your backyard barbecue, firing down beers or Red Bulls in between groovy asides and gnarly metal peaks. Their song "Come On," played as a punctuating encore, felt like an invitation to just go with what they do, warts and all. It doesn't all work, but enough does—and often enough—to convince you that you're seeing something special, and at Bowery, you landed right about when people started to know. ***Chad Berndtson***

Jeremy Gordon

Matrix

BY BRADLEY TUCKER

WILCO'S STAGE manager, who simply goes by the name Matrix, is currently at home in Brisbane, Australia, for some much-needed rest before another long stretch on the road. On June 1, Matrix, who also serves as Jeff Tweedy's guitar tech, will join the group on an extended tour spanning the United States and Europe that will last until November. While the day never quite ends on the road, and he's on call 24/7, Matrix looks forward to seeing the final truck door close at the end of the night and then grabbing a cold beer.

What was the live music scene like where you grew up, and what was the first band or album that you really got into?

I grew up in a small country town where there was no real music scene. Occasionally, a bigger band might come through town and they would play at the local picture theater.

There was a program on TV in Australia called *Countdown*—I reckon everyone watched it on the weekend. They'd play clips, have bands appear in studio, and then have a 10–1 chart at the end of the show. So there was exposure to what was going on at the time, mostly more mainstream stuff, but it would be my biggest musical memory from my younger days.

It's hard to say who the first band I got into was, maybe an Oz rock band called Cold Chisel and then, definitely, Bowie. In fact, *Ziggy Stardust* is one of those albums that has always been there in the car. At the moment, though, I'm listening to a Beethoven collection I got from my dad.

The Rest Hotel at Milson's Point in Sydney became a venue that I eventually frequented every Friday night. I roadied for a Sonic Youth tour [in support of the *Daydream Nation* album] in Australia in 1989. I'd really never seen or heard anything like that before and it changed everything, for sure.

Was there a particular job that you watched someone do that led you into the business?

There was a solo artist called Pat Drummond who'd play to an overflowing, packed house every Friday night. He had his own PA and a couple of guys to look after it. I'd talk to them and help out occasionally, and that was where my interest in this business started.

What was your first job?

I'd help those guys out after the show sometimes. Then, one of them wasn't available for a show one night, so they asked if I wanted to help. I got paid $50 and the rest, as they say, is history. One gig led to another and so on, and then I left my day job and kept going.

What was an early lesson you learned?

Pay attention, and remember it's not about you—it's about the band.

How did you become involved with Wilco?

Wilco were doing a tour of Australia in 2007. A mate of mine, a former tour manager of Wilco's who was the promoter repping the tour, asked me to tech for both Jeff and Nels [Cline]. I was just meant to fill in for that tour because they had a guy lined up to start when they got back to the States.

The tour went well. I enjoyed working for the band. It started out as a very busy guitar-tech job because I was doing Jeff and Nels—now that's changed to just teching for Jeff—but the difficult aspects of the job were great. They went back to the States, did some shows with the other guy, and it didn't go so well. I got a call at 2 a.m. on a Sunday morning asking me if I could come to London the following Wednesday, and I've been with them ever since—about nine years now.

What is your best day like? What is your worst or most stressful day like?

When the show goes well, they are all the best days. When the show doesn't go so well, or you make a stupid mistake, it's always the worst day. As a guitar tech, I feel a bit connected to what's going on onstage—especially with a lot of guitar changes for Jeff. I can be the first one to hear about elation or frustration.

Where are you when the show is going on?

Stage right—guitar world.

How has your current job changed from when you started?

It's a lot more professional now, not that I wasn't before. Before, you had to do your job, but there was more of a looseness about it. I think the whole thing has just stepped up a lot more.

Everything to Fear but Fear Itself

The Nickel Creek and Watkins Family Hour guitarist offers a friendly reminder that if you see something, say something else BY SEAN WATKINS

HELLO FOLKS. I was told I could write about anything I wanted for this little piece, so I've decided to focus on something I feel couldn't be more relevant than it is right now. I will address the dangers of listening to and/or considering the ideas of anyone having a different opinion than your own, on any subject, whether it be via the media or a personal encounter. I will also offer advice as to what you can do, should you find yourself in a compromising position of having to engage with someone whose ideas and opinions don't coincide with yours in any way.

Let's begin with the media. As we all know, the media has many faces—radio, TV, print and Internet/social, but the wild, chaotic jungle that is the Internet and social media is by far the most dangerous of all. It's a place where all kinds of foreign ideas are floating around willy-nilly, bumping into our own and, most alarmingly, causing us to evaluate whether or not we are indeed right about everything we know to be true. The Internet can be a wonderful thing but, make no mistake, it has a dark and dangerous side that has the ability to shake you to your core. So, in light of all this danger, here are a few precautionary words I think might help you find your way through this maze of foreign ideas and opinions.

First off, it's extremely critical that you don't watch, click on, read or listen to anyone who has an opinion that differs from your own. It's very risky. Once you get the stench of another person's well-thought-out and formulated ideas (as they will tell you) on you, there's no getting it off. You can't go back. Remember, the world is very simple and you have a solid grasp on it. You already know the truth. Why would you waste your time listening to someone say something to you if what they are saying is not what you already know to be true? You are solid in what you know and there is no need to reconsider anything. Bending your ear to listen to someone who doesn't share your truth will cause it to break right off. That, of course, is a metaphor that I just made up, but it is the gospel truth. So, always seek confirmation and know that when you come across an idea that isn't confirming your worldview or any strong opinion you may have, you have three options:

1) Shoot it down immediately. *Typing a quick, rude and insulting comment not only proves that you're right, but can also be very satisfying.*

2) Make fun of it. *This is a classic technique that goes back to grade school.*

3) Ignore it. *Just let it go by the wayside and pretend you never heard it.*

Whatever you do, do not engage in a normal, open dialogue with it. Think monologue folks, *not* dialogue. But if, by chance, you find yourself caught in a conversation with the enemy, *do not* take in any viewpoints for personal consideration. Instead, as soon as you hear someone start to say something that is counter to your viewpoint, begin forming your rebuttal. It can be anything—a statistic you heard somewhere, a YouTube clip or even a nice rhetorical question. Just reach back into your bank of pre-made arguments, points or quotes, and find that perfect fit of a reply that will destroy your opponent. This technique is good for two reasons:

1) It makes you appear smart, quick and witty. Your opponent will think that you are reacting on your feet and respect you for that.

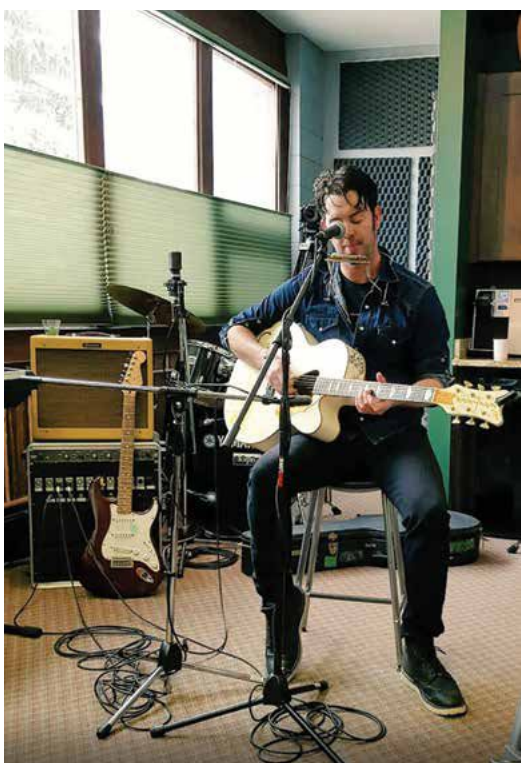
2) It works as a deflector shield against the flaming arrows of untruth and foreign ideas maliciously being shot at you. Those arrows won't be able to harm you because your brain is too preoccupied searching for that perfect comeback to your opponent to take in any outside information (i.e. whatever nonsense he/she is saying to you). It's a beautiful thing.

So, to conclude, stand strong and relax in the knowledge that you are right and that you have it all figured out. Go through life that way and don't ever start to consider an idea or opinion that doesn't already exist in your brain. If you do, then you will probably die.

Guitarist Sean Watkins co-founded Nickel Creek in 1989 and continues to perform with his sister Sara in Watkins Family Hour. He released his fifth solo album, the satirical What to Fear, *on March 18 via Thirty Tigers.*

G. Love & Special Sauce: Tour Diary

In 2014, G. Love marked Special Sauce's 20th anniversary by reuniting his original rhythm section of drummer Jeffrey Clemens and bassist Jim Prescott, and dropping an inspired new studio album, *Sugar*. That celebratory release cracked the *Billboard* Top 50 and, only 18 months later, the classic Special Sauce trio pushed out another set of jam-informed Delta blues and classic hip-hop, *Love Saves the Day*. While G. Love—who was born Garrett Dutton—laid the groundwork for his 10th album with the help of Clemens and Prescott, he also invited a number of high-profile guests to the party, including Lucinda Williams, Citizen Cope, Los Lobos' David Hidalgo, Ozomatli, DJ Logic, Money Mark and Jack Johnson bandmates Adam Topol and Zach Gill (also of ALO). Special Sauce have spent the winter supporting *Love Saves the Day* on the road—barnstorming up to 20 cities in a month—and have kept their collaborative spirit alive both onstage and through a series of unique PledgeMusic initiatives. Dutton captured some highlights during the winter leg of his never-ending tour, which climaxed with some spirited Colorado shows in late-February.



◀ I had a good afternoon jam at Aspen, Colo.'s KSPN-FM before our sold-out Belly Up show. I was honestly a bit sick this day, but I managed to pull off a solid acoustic set that included "Back to Boston," "Muse" and "Little Run Around." I've been using my Grestch "White" Falcon acoustic for my radio visits.

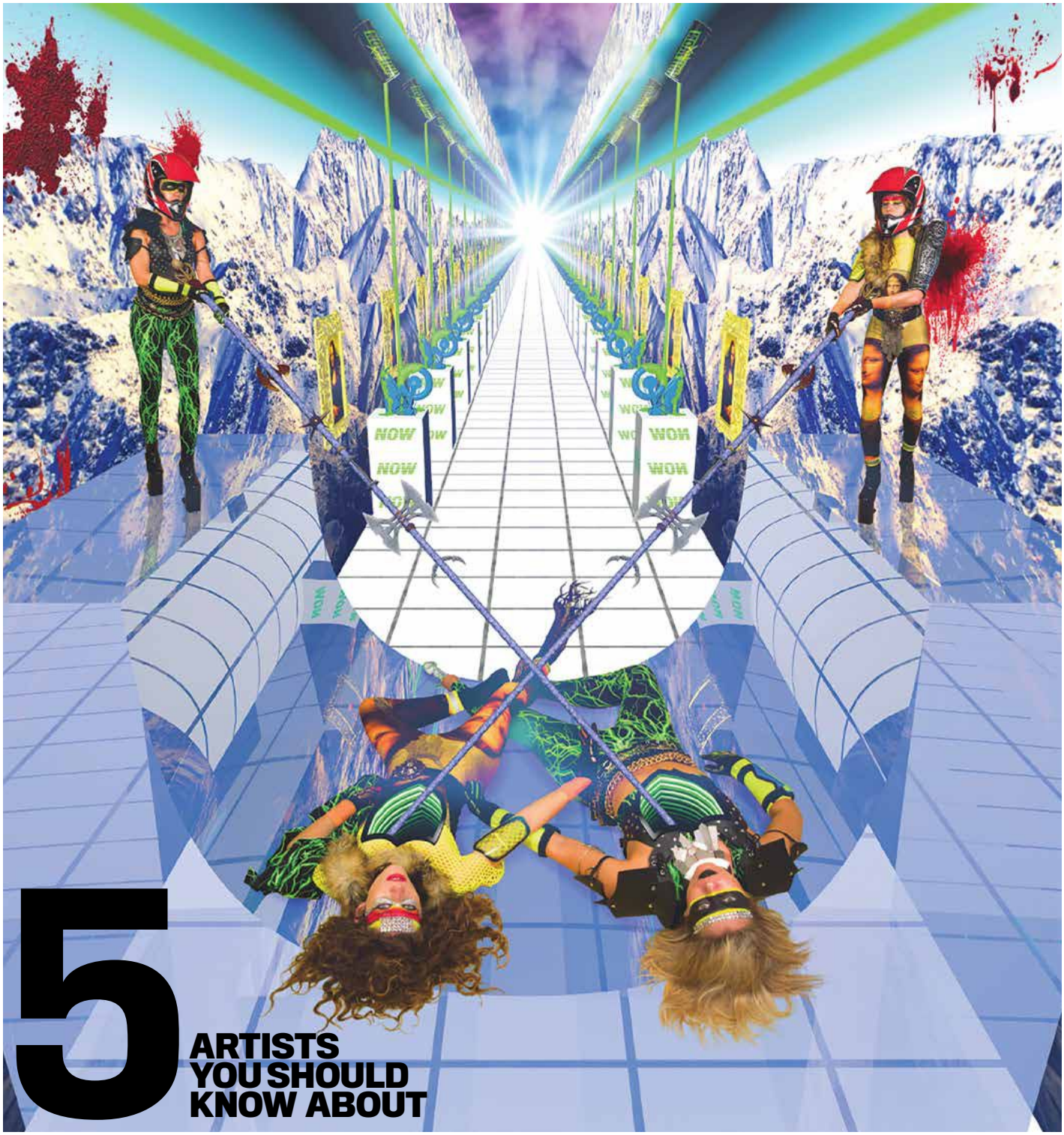
▲ Sometimes people hit me up on Instagram or Twitter and offer unique opportunities. John McLaughlin invited me to his haberdashery, The Brass Rooster, in Milwaukee, to check out the shop and make me a custom hat. All his hatting equipment is from the 1800s and early 1900s. I love vintage. I love things that are antique and authentic. He's got it all. It's a real treat to see a master craftsman at work, keeping an age-old craft alive. His hats are insane and you can order them online as well. Support local craftsmen.

▶

To celebrate the release of Love Saves the Day, I offered a "Cooking with G" pledge. I went to prepare my masterpiece beer-can chickens for a lovely family in Seattle. We ate, we drank, we jammed. And I'm telling you, I can cook it up, boyee. Look at those chickens! Perfection.

▼

We had the legendary DJ Logic join us for our show at Denver's Ogden Theatre. I love this room—always have, always will. Logic came and joined us for "Baby Why You Do Me Like That" from *Love Saves the Day* in the first set, and sat in for the whole encore along with lap-slide master Roosevelt Collier. It's always a pure pleasure to get to jam onstage and offstage with our musical brethren.



5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Prince Rama BROOKLYN, N.Y.

NOW-AGE MUSIC

Prince Rama's story involves the mysticism of sound and music, and begins with two sisters at a Hare Krishna commune in Central Texas. It was there that **Taraka** and **Nimai Larson** spent their youth, far from the reaches of modern-day society, Hollywood cinema, *Seinfeld* and *Friends*. After high school, they went their separate ways—Nimai to an art school in Austin, Texas, and Taraka to an ashram in rural Pennsylvania, where she planned to study in hopes of becoming a monk. When an elder Larson recognized her musical talents and gifted her with a keyboard, Taraka brought it back to her room and wrote the first Prince Rama song. That was in 2008. Nimai felt a similar calling and dropped out of art school, and the duo formed a dance-inspired psych band woven around their metaphysical "Now Age" philosophy. "[Now Age] was just a way of fusing the spiritual and musical worlds together for me, and making this space that a lot of people see as secular or mundane something very sacred and very venerable—just looking at the concert space as a veritable utopian space, the constants of sonic ritual and getting in touch with higher spiritual realms." In 2010, a chance meeting with Animal Collective's Avey Tare led to Prince Rama signing with the Paw Tracks label and releasing their breakout album, *Shadow Temple.* Then, last year, while living on a black metal commune in Estonia, Taraka went through a defining near-death experience that heavily influenced their latest album, *Xtreme Now*. "I think we're moving toward more of a 'speed aesthetic'—people need more shock value to remind them they're existing or something. I wanted to write an album that provides a score for this sort of future." princerama.com ***Sam Davis***

The Marcus King Band GREENVILLE, S.C.

SOUL THERAPY

There's a certain humbleness in **Marcus King**'s Southern drawl. He doesn't sound like you might imagine a 20-year-old would after learning he will be playing at Austin's SXSW conference and festival for the first time. Shocked as he is, King remains calm, but honored—like he's been doing this for years. And he has. He's a third-generation bluesman from Greenville, S.C., who's already been playing live shows for half his life. His long, curly hair, wailing Gibson SG and eponymous band name evoke links to Derek Trucks or Warren Haynes. But King is more of a mixture of these influences—and *their* influences—plus a welcomed dose of jazz-fusion. King admits that his band isn't the first to blend blues, rock and jazz, but there's a renewed energy here (with all due respect). "I feel like, since we're all young and we're really hungry for it, it's just got this intensity behind it," King says from Carriage House Studios in Stamford, Conn., where he's working alongside Haynes on his band's second LP. If you pick up The Marcus King Band's first album, last year's *Soul Insight*, or catch them on tour, then you'll discover King's not-so-secret weapon: his voice. Equal parts soulful and powerful, King says that he finds his identity in his singing and songwriting. "I'm pretty much screaming everything that I feel to as many people who will listen," King explains. "It's my form of therapy." marcuskingband.com ***Matt Nestor***

G-Nome Project JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

HOLY-CITY LIVETRONICA

People flock to the holy city of Jerusalem for spiritual fulfillment, but for a community of American expats, a different sort of quest is finally being realized—one for the jam scene they left back home. Keyboardist **Eyal Salomon** was standing in a Jerusalem bus station in 2010 when another American noticed his Disco Biscuits hat. That connection led to the formation of **G-Nome Project**, Israel's very first improvisational livetronica band. "My biggest fear when I moved to Israel was that I wouldn't be able to form a band," says Salomon. "But as we say in Hebrew: *M'hashamayim*. From the sky, it all fell into place." Today, the quartet regularly fills Jerusalem venues with many Americans craving a fix of their infectious, trance-heavy, nonstop jamming. Their American tours are steadily gaining momentum, too—this summer, G-Nome will hit the stage at Camp Bisco for the first time, with brand new guitarist (and only native Israeli member) **Shlomo Langer** in tow. "He doesn't come from the jam world; he doesn't know Phish or the Biscuits. His English is rusty," says Salomon. "But he nails our songs. Whatever's inside of him, it perfectly matches the sound we needed." g-nomeproject.net ***Justin Jacobs***

The Hip Abduction ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

REGGAE-ROOTED ELECTRONICS

"I don't hate being genre-fied or whatever you would call it," **David New**, the leader of Afro-pop/indie-rock septet **The Hip Abduction** says of his group's success on the reggae charts following their 2013 self-titled debut. "It does suck that a lot of music critics and a lot of people in general will just brush us off because of the last album." New admits that the group's most recent effort, *Gold Under the Glow*, signals a shift in sound, but one that is focused and not designed to alienate their already strong fanbase. "I want to make it clear that we never said, 'Oh, screw reggae,'" he notes. "We try to keep that inspiration rooted there, and we're just moving with more of an electronic sound." The Hip Abduction hail from St. Petersburg, Fla., a town just outside of Tampa on the state's western coast. New says that while there is a "thriving art scene," it isn't exactly the most fertile ground for launching a group. Some of the band's influences are actually derived from New's time in the Caribbean, which is where they honed in on their Afrobeat tendencies. For the time being, New is focused on the future, admitting, "The difference between the old album and the new album? Same sound, same jam approach, killer live shows, but there's more electronics on the new record and will be moving forward." thehipabduction.com ***Rob Slater***

Nico Yaryan LOS ANGELES

EXORCISING EMOTION

Making music can be a cathartic experience, at least as far as singer-songwriter **Nico Yaryan** is concerned. The 32-year-old California native's debut album, *What A Tease*, reflects the longing and frustration he felt during a long-distance relationship with a woman who lived half a world away. Raised by self-described hippies and initially drawn to beats and MIDI samplers when he was an aspiring artist, Yaryan got his first taste of touring while drumming behind singer-songwriter and high school buddy Hanni El Khatib. Feeling frustrated at his lack of creative input, Yaryan eventually opted to go it alone and focused on learning guitar and writing songs that expressed both his inner emotions and sentiments that could be shared universally. "It can be both easy and difficult," Yaryan says of the process. "It's easy to draw on things I've experienced, but also difficult because I have to relive those feelings every night when I'm onstage." Sadly, his overseas romance ended, but Yaryan's ambitions remained unbounded. *What A Tease* found him recording the entire album on his own. "I've always flirted with a lot of different instruments," he explains. "I'm a jack of all trades, but I'm not a master of any of them." Citing John Lennon and Neil Young as essential influences, Yaryan blends an acoustic sensibility with his early love for rhythm. "I'm simply trying to write beautiful songs," he says. "I want them to instill the kind of quality that ensures they'll stand up." nicoyaryan.com ***Lee Zimmerman***

BOMBINO

BY JOHN ADAMIAN

Bombino might have been a truck driver if he hadn't been blessed with a musical gift. The 36-year-old guitarist and singer from Niger creates music that can evoke the stark beauty of the vast desert, while conjuring images of guitar-god flamboyance. The extravagance is in the playing, not in the presentation. At its core, the music is humble enough, taking ornamental touches and elevating them to hypnotic levels. On his new album, *Azel*—his third studio recording, which was produced by Dirty Projectors' David Longstreth—Bombino plays a mix of electric and acoustic, sometimes backed by a band, sometimes accompanied by hand drumming or clapping. (The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach produced Bombino's last studio album, 2013's *Nomad*.)

Born Goumar Almoctar, Bombino has a guitar style that is pyrotechnic without being showy. On "Inar," his acoustic sounds out—stuttering grace notes that turn back on themselves, bursting forward in cascades like the sound of a kora. At other times, Bombino thrums out droning notes with his right hand, while the fingers of his left hand flutter and pull away at the strings in rapid figures that can sound almost like a bagpipe—the phrases hinge and pivot on these kinds of accents and filigrees. Other songs, like "Iyat Ninhay," open with astounding double-tracked electric guitar statements and slide into ominous riffs that, set against more plodding beats, might be at home on a Black Sabbath tune. His singing is soulful, and the tricky offbeat accents give the music a reggae feel in some places.

It's emblematic of the music of the Tuareg, the traditionally nomadic ethnic group that lives along the Sahara in parts of Mali, Niger and Algeria. (Bombino has called some of their hybrid grooves "tuareggae.") Groups like Tinariwen and Etran Finatawa have helped connect this guitar-based music with listeners from beyond Africa. As with those groups—and related artists like Ali Farka Touré—Bombino's music is often labeled "desert blues," with its loping rhythms, modal grooves and call-and-response structures. Bombino initially found a wider audience when Hisham Mayet, the co-founder of the Sublime Frequencies label, recorded him at a 2007 wedding in Agadez.

"Even today, I play a lot of weddings," Bombino says in an email, which was translated by his manager. "Weddings are the main source of income for musicians in Niger, effectively."

Niger hasn't always been so welcoming to the Tuareg. Following a rebellion in 1990, Bombino, then a boy, and his family fled to Algeria and later to Libya. These were formative years for him as a musician, as he picked up riffs and techniques from watching Jimi Hendrix videos, an influence that remains clear in the ornate percussive flourishes of his left hand. Later, the government in Niger banned the guitar among the Tuareg, since it was viewed as an instrument and symbol of rebellion. By this point, Bombino was making a living playing guitar. When two of his bandmates were executed, he moved again, to Burkina Faso, on the other side of the Sahara.

He was featured, along with other Tuareg musicians, in the 2010 documentary *Agadez, the Music and the Rebellion*. For many years, hostilities against the Tuareg had been a source of violence in these regions at times, but in recent years, the political climate has changed and Islamic radicals have become a more pressing security concern.

"At this moment, things are basically peaceful in Niger, despite the grave problems in Mali, Burkina, Nigeria and others," Bombino says. "Of course, there are still very big problems, and there are regions in Niger that I would say are not safe for foreigners, but, at the same time, Niger is doing better politically than I can ever remember, in terms of integration and solidarity among all the ethnic groups of Niger. We Tuareg returned in 2009 and, since then, the society has become much more open to the Tuareg people and accepting of our rights and our culture. For me, this is a major victory, even if we continue to have serious problems."

Bombino has been able to return home, and he currently resides in Niamey with his wife and daughters.

"There is a magical feeling in the [Sahara desert] that you cannot experience anywhere else," he says. "And what makes Agadez special is the people there who are so kind. Agadez is a poor town but the culture there is rich and beautiful."

MARC FORD

BY BRIAN ROBBINS

When Marc Ford launched a Kickstarter effort in late January to fund the recording of his latest solo album, he offered up this thought: "Imagine if Jimi Hendrix was signed to Sun Records, but he made a record at Chess. If we can get an album that sounds anything like that, I'll be happy."

Just a few hours after the late-February sessions came to a close, the soft-spoken guitarist/singer/songwriter answers with a laugh when asked if his expectations were met: "Yeah, that Jimi thing I was describing was a *feeling* rather than a sound, and I think we got it. To me, Jimi was all about the freedom to explore places that people either feared or didn't even know existed. This record was about taking the traditional, gut-level blues thing and really stretching out and experimenting with it—not being locked into anything."

For some, the notion that Ford even needs a Kickstarter effort to support an album might come as a surprise—after all, he played guitar with The Black Crowes during one of their most commercially successful and musically adventurous periods. But Ford's time with the Crowes was just one chapter of the almost 50-year-old musician's evolving story, and while his solos on tunes such as "Sting Me" and "Sometimes Salvation" may be certified guitar-geek porn, there aren't any royalty checks rolling in. As the guitarist explains, he was an employee during his tours of duty with the Crowes—a valued hired hand, but a hired hand nonetheless.

But these days, Ford doesn't waste a lot of time looking in the rearview mirror. And if he does wax poetic on his past mistakes, it's only to remember the lessons he learned during the dark years of the late '90s, when he was dismissed from the Crowes while he struggled with a crumbling marriage and a heroin habit.

"Sometimes it takes waking up in an intensive care unit to get your attention," says Ford. "I'd hit rock bottom and realizing that forced me to take an inventory: 'What's going on here?' It was a difficult situation, but it forced me to do something else."

One key "something else" was embracing religion in his life. He talks freely about spirituality with the same low-key, Southern-California drawl that he uses to discuss fuzz pedals, but there's no question of how serious Ford is when he admits: "I have more faith in God than I do in myself, you know? When you're at the point where you're unable to do for yourself, then you have to allow other things to enter into your life, and I'm grateful to be here now."

Over the years since his recovery, Ford has shared the stage with the likes of Ben Harper, Booker T. Jones and Mike Campbell, but he's just as passionate about gigs in small, local clubs. "That was something I came to a while back," he says. "And once I did, it was clear as day: I need to do this for me. I love making music when nobody's listening, too, you know? It's a personal thing. For me, that's my connection to God." (He briefly rejoined The Black Crowes during their high-profile reunion run in 2005 and 2006 but ultimately left the group to protect his sobriety.)

These days, Ford savors his everyday life. He enjoys making music with his family and recently produced and played on his wife Kirsten's new solo album, *I Belong to You*, and has collaborated with his son Elijah—who also has his own music cooking—both onstage and in the studio.

Ford's spiritual quest also led him to singer-songwriter Chris Lizotte, who shepherds the music program at the Church by the Sea in Laguna Beach. Besides Sunday morning worship services, Ford has worked as a producer and guitarist on two albums with Lizotte. Then there's another kind of church—his gritty, greasy, funky-to-the-bone work with the Neptune Blues Club, an ensemble boasting bassist John Bazz, drummer Anthony Arvizu and Mike Malone on keys and harmonica. The group had already booked time at San Francisco's Tiny Telephone studios with John Vanderslice behind the control board when the Kickstarter was announced. In fact, the quartet was tucked into a van and headed up the coast when the fundraising effort was still shy of its goal. "Yeah, well, you gotta have faith," Ford reveals. The band went in with very little preparation and only four days to lay down the basic tracks.

He shrugs it off. "We've all been playing for a pretty long time; the details get worked out in a second. Finding the heart of the song is the real challenge.

"But that's what the Neptune Blues Club has always been about," he continues. "It's more than just the blues. It's like the Elks Club getting together, only we play more than talk."

And playing is exactly what they did, working through tunes that range from deep roots and dirty blues to that Hendrixian territory mentioned earlier, including a new original called "Deep Water."

"When we recorded that one, it was a powerful moment," says Ford. "Everybody in the studio felt it. Mike looked at me and said, 'We ought to call this album *Deep Water*. Something just happened here.'"

Butch Trucks

A year and a half after the Allman Brothers Band's final show, the group's founding drummer returns to the road with two new bands and a recently unearthed archival release BY MIKE GREENHAUS

BROTHERS & SISTERS (& SONS)

The Freight Train Band started about a year ago when I was playing a little club outside of Tallahassee, Fla. It wasn't a gig I was particularly proud of, but somebody came up and said, "There's this girl, Heather Gillis, who wants to sit in," and she blew us away. Berry Duane Oakley—Berry's son who plays bass and sings with us—and I were thinking of putting something together, so he brought in his friend Damon Fowler on guitar and I called Heather and my son Vaylor, who's the kid on the cover of *Brothers & Sisters*. He's not that cute anymore, but he's a hell of a guitar player. So, before we knew it, we had three guitarists. It sounded huge. I also called Bruce Katz—who has played with Gregg and played with the Allman Brothers a ton of times at the Beacon when there was an Allman Brothers—and Tad Isch is helping me out hauling drums around and playing a second kit on songs like "Hot 'Lanta" and "Elizabeth Reed." We do about four Allman Brothers songs a night with three-part harmonies, but we do a lot of other things, too—Jeff Beck's "Freeway Jam," John Scofield's "Jeep on 35" and I even sang for the first time in 45 years on Bob Dylan's "Highway 61."

I've been flying back and forth from France—where my wife and I live for part of the year—to play these shows and have spent a lot of time driving between gigs in a car with Vaylor. He's taken all his vacation time to play with us, so he's only going to join us for festivals and weekend gigs for now, but Heather has stepped up to play his parts. She's turned into a monster on guitar.

THE ALLMAN-LESS BROTHERS

Les Brers is five former members of the Allman Brothers—the entire rhythm section of me, Oteil Burbridge, Marc Quiñones and Jaimoe, as well as Jack Pearson, who played guitar with us from '97–'99. Jack brought his friend Pat Bergeson in on second guitar, and we have Bruce Katz again on keys and Lamar Williams Jr. singing. We also have Bill Evans, who played with Miles Davis, with us when he's available. I tried to get him to join the Allman Brothers Band [when Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks announced their departure], but I was voted down. We just played these shows in Macon, Ga., in order to come up with some new material—Pat and Jack are writing some songs just for Les Brers. So we'll play our original material, new covers and some of the classic Allman Brothers songs. But mostly, we want to keep up that improvisational spirit that the Allman Brothers had because nobody else is doing it. Gregg, Derek and Warren are all out doing what they want and it's all great—I love what they are doing—but nobody is playing one song for 15 or 30 minutes. I feel the need to do that because I love playing that kind of music and I think this next generation is picking up on it—people like Taz [Brandon Niederauer]. He was the star of our Roots Rock Revival [master class and jam session] and now he is starring in *School of Rock* on Broadway.

FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND

What was really special about the show we are releasing [*Live from A&R Studios: New York, August 26, 1971*] is that Duane had just flown back from playing King Curtis' funeral. Duane had actually played with him before he formed the Allman Brothers, when he was recording at Muscle Shoals, and continued to work with him. They became best friends. King Curtis was stabbed in front of his apartment right

after Duane recorded with him. I remember picking up Duane at the airport—this was when you had to check your guitar before getting on a flight—and when he opened up the case, the head of his cherry Les Paul Firebird [was broken] and I thought he was going to rip that airport apart. Luckily, he found a very good luthier who put the head back on and now that guitar is in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. When Duane went to that funeral, that was the first time in quite a long time that the six of us weren't together. We were reeling from the loss of King Curtis and happy to have Duane back with us. It was such an emotional night.

Duane actually missed a few shows around then when he was off playing with Derek and the Dominos. I'll always remember the time we played a show in Miami and Clapton was sitting in the front row with Tom Dowd and the Dominos. They came backstage and later we all jammed. They had good songs and were great players, but they were also too heavy into the booze and the drugs, and Duane walked into that whole lineup like a stick of dynamite. Of course, for our 40th anniversary, Clapton played with us for two nights at the Beacon. He didn't say anything, but he played his butt off and leaned over to Derek Trucks at one point and said, "That is the most fun I've had in 25 years."

SOUL SERENADE

There were about 100 people in the audience at this A&R Studios show, which was broadcast through WPLG. Partway through the show, Duane stepped up to the mic and started talking about King Curtis before "You Don't Love Me." We didn't know what was going to happen. It was the most I ever heard him speak onstage—he would occasionally step up and say a few things, like the introduction to "Stormy Monday" on *At Fillmore East,* but he never spoke like this. He told everyone how special King Curtis was and how Stevie Wonder and Aretha Franklin had played "Soul Serenade" at his funeral. Then, as we were playing "You Don't Love Me" and getting to the jam at the end, Duane started "Soul Serenade" for King Curtis and we all just climbed onboard. It was three or four minutes of pure intensity, with Duane playing as only he could. It was so emotional. We had no damn idea that two months later Duane would be dead.

Dino Perrucci

GROUP AT WORK

Nolatet

A New Orleans Act for the Ages

The term "supergroup" is attached to seemingly any new project in the current musical landscape, possibly as an alternative to "side-project," which can come off as ancillary. In the case of Nolatet, which features Mike Dillon, James Singleton, Brian Haas and Johnny Vidacovich, the distinction feels just.

"[It's] a dream come true for me," pianist Brian Haas explains of the project. Haas, who is 42 and the youngest member of the quartet, made his mark as the leader of Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey. (Percussionist Dillon is in his 50s, bassist Singleton is in his 60s and drummer Vidacovich is in his 70s.) Haas first joined his bandmates on short notice during a set at the 2014 Telluride Jazz Festival after another "special guest" didn't come through. "We didn't have any rehearsals or anything," he recalls. "Afterward, we all went and sat in the dressing room, and we were like, 'Wow, what just happened?'"

"We liked the way it sounded," drummer Vidacovich, nearly 30 years Haas' elder, notes, in his thick Cajun accent. "With cats like this, heavyweight dudes like these guys, it would be very easy to start stepping on each other's toes. What's funny about this band—and I noticed it from the very beginning—is that everybody is very polite and [they] don't step on each other's toes."

Their onstage chemistry led to a studio session on a Sunday in February 2015, after a run of shows in the Crescent City. The result of that session is *Dogs*, released this past February, an effort that Vidacovich says is about "90 percent" improvisational. "We're all strong and we all very much love the spontaneous kind of things we can do. It's a collective thing, and it's a non-one-guy thing. It's just a very collaborative space and energy that we can go to that no one as an individual can go to."

Haas estimates that the record was finished in about two hours. "And that's including a 30-minute break when the fire department showed up," he adds. "There was some imbibing in the studio near a smoke alarm."

He continues: "At some point, Johnny stood up and said, 'OK, that's it, we got a record.' It was Super Bowl Sunday—we were lucky to even get him to come to the studio at all."

Both musicians express an immense gratitude for this project falling into their respective laps. As Haas says of Vidacovich: "He has the bar raised so high that we're all just trying to rise to the occasion that he creates by his presence. He doesn't play music; he is music. He comes from a city that is music."

The drummer's energy is palpable. "It keeps me very entertained," Vidacovich says of trying to keep up with three band members younger than him. "It makes me smile and it makes me happy. The happiest times in my life are when I'm playing music with guys that I love, and everybody loves the music—that collective love. Old-school hippie shit, bro." ***Rob Slater***

GROUP AT WORK

Night Moves

Woody Space-Rock

Everyone's heard about the dreaded sophomore slump, when a band hits it big with their debut album but fails to reproduce the magic on their second go-around. With pressure coming from both the record company and fans—not to mention the rigors of touring around that first record—it can be hard to find the time and inspiration to make quality music.

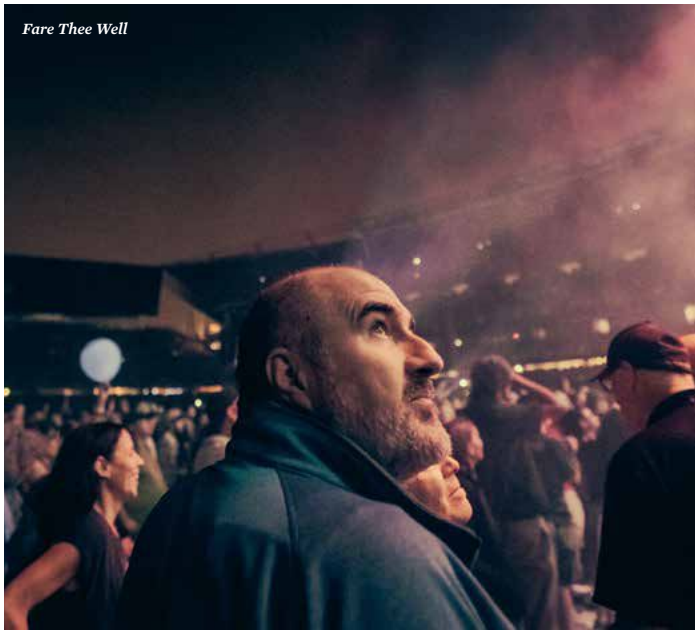
Luckily for John Pelant, the primary songwriter for Minneapolis-based group Night Moves, he and his band were given ample leeway from their label, Domino, to find the right sound for their follow-up to 2012's *Colored Emotions*, and Pelant believes that it was for the better. "It was frustrating at the time," he admits. "But I think the record we made is better than the one we would have made, had they let us go in the studio right after we finished touring *Colored Emotions*."

Instead, Pelant spent the ensuing months and years holed up in his basement, writing and rewriting songs and sharing them with his musical partner and Night Moves' bassist, Micky Alfano. "There are definitely [times] where I'll be like, 'Dude, we got it. We don't need to rearrange everything again; this version's great,'" Alfano says. "Then, he'll do two more after that and I'll think this new one is better than the first one. The advantage to having so much time to work on stuff is that it encouraged John to push himself into some different territories that he hadn't really worked in before."

Pennied Days, the band's sophomore effort, does venture into new territory while keeping the free and airy spirit that made their debut so likable. In the studio with producer John Agnello—who has worked with the likes of Kurt Vile, Sonic Youth, Dinosaur Jr. and Okkervil River—the band took Pelant's rough, but meticulously wrought, demos and built a fleshed-out album. "We were able to make a hybrid," says Pelant of the process of using some of his basement recordings and redoing other portions. "That was a cool thing with Agnello, that we were able to get the song the best it could have possibly been—the best of both worlds." With a more piano-and-keyboard-heavy sound that reflects Pelant's evolving songwriting process, *Pennied Days* shows a maturing side of the Night Moves duo, who were only 21 and 23 when they wrote *Colored Emotions*. "It still has a lot of woody, warm, natural-sounding stuff," Pelant says. "But it's a better synthesis of that kind of space-and-folk-rock shit that was present on the first one." ***Matt Inman***

Chip Hooper

BY PATRICK JORDAN



Fare Thee Well

THE WORLD OF MUSIC suffered another heartbreaking loss on March 5 with the passing of legendary agent Chip Hooper. While Chip wasn't a cultural icon like Bowie or Lemmy, Chip's behind the scenes work as an agent for longtime clients like Phish and Dave Matthews Band, and as the worldwide head of the Paradigm Talent Agency, has made an impact on the music business that will endure for generations to come. Chip's passions for music, art, friends and, especially, his family were incredibly contagious to anyone he came in contact with, and he was beloved for it.

Prior to working in the music business, I was a fan of the aforementioned bands and drove countless miles to see them perform, often wondering why they chose to play the ski resort or the small college theater instead of the "blank" arena. Only years later did I learn of the hours upon hours of strategic conversations between band and management that led to those decisions. At the center of those conversations for DMB and Phish was Chip Hooper.

My first conversation with Chip Hooper, in March of 2003, set the tone for our entire relationship. I was a brand new record-industry defector entering into the world of artist management at Red Light. My job title was "marketing," but with Dave Matthews Band's current day-to-day manager departing the company within two weeks of my arrival, there was an incredible sense of urgency to learn as much as I could as fast as possible.

During that initial conversation, Chip instantly disarmed my nervous energy by asking me a barrage of questions about every aspect of my life. The subjects ranged from my upbringing to my hobbies and my taste in music. Was I married? Did I drink wine? I can barely remember everything we talked about, but the conversation easily lasted an hour or two. We never got to the business matters at hand that day, as Chip had to take another call. I was stunned that this busy guy would want to spend so much time hearing about what made me tick. He wasn't being polite—he actually wanted to know everything about me. This is how Chip did business. He was a master of humanizing everything he did, especially business. As a result, he became friends with almost everyone he encountered, and it was clear after our initial conversation that we were going to be great friends.

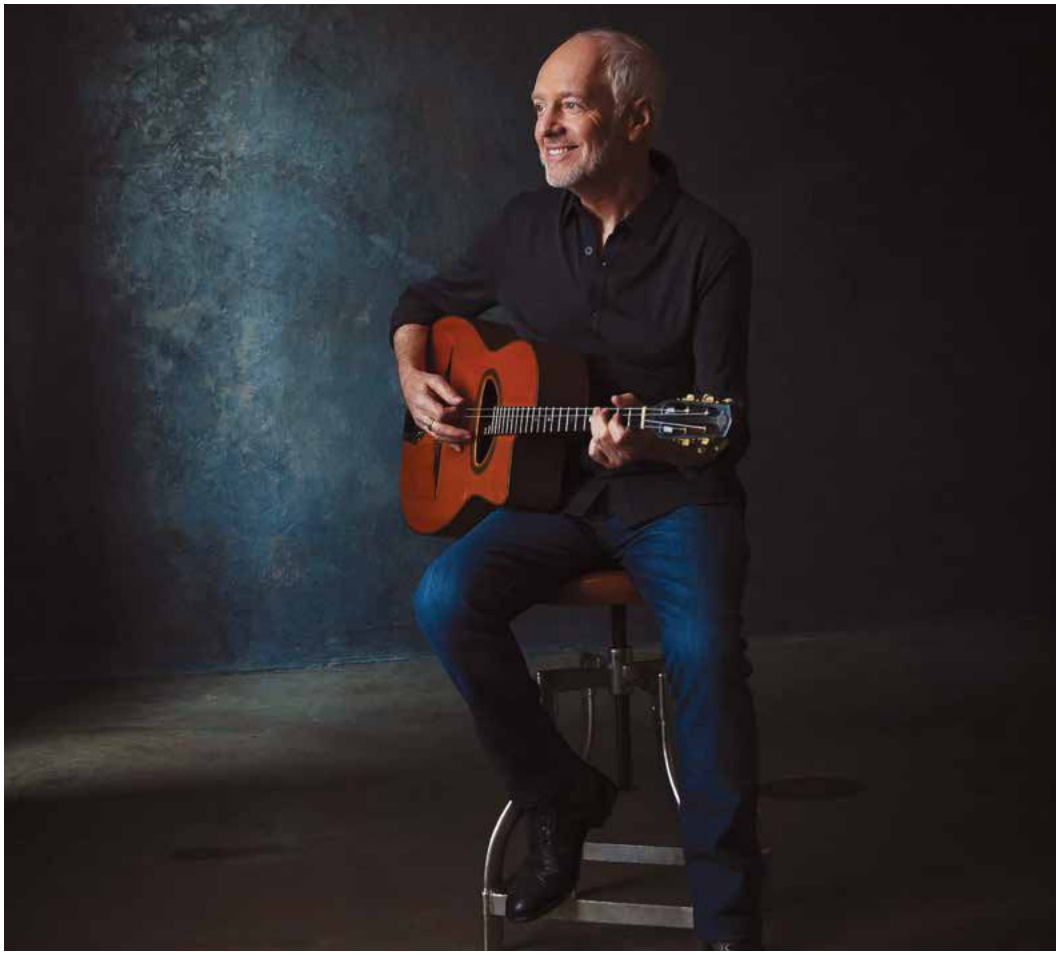
As time went on, Chip became a key resource as my duties with Dave Matthews Band and Red Light grew over the years. His seemingly tireless mentorship was easily one of the biggest gifts ever bestowed on me. Over the years, he counseled me through countless professional and personal tribulations. When it came time for my first child to be born, he relished in giving advice on parenting, as his children were his ultimate pride and joy. As a young parent in a demanding business, it was reassuring to see an executive I looked up to so close to his children. It gave me hope that I wasn't going to screw up this parenting thing, despite my schedule and work-related travel. When I was fucking up, Chip would be the first person to let me know. He would often ring my desk phone late after hours and, when I would answer, he would tell me to go home and be with my family. He understood balance.

Chip loved a good sports analogy and, to many, he was the Michael Jordan of agents. He would score a triple-double on a daily basis in the areas of friendship, loyalty and striving to do what's right for the client. He was a larger than life superhero. So you can imagine the incredible shock and sadness I felt several years ago when he called to give me the news that he had cancer and the prognosis wasn't good. Just like our first conversation, I can vividly recall exactly where I was when he called. It was devastating news at the time, although Chip assured me and everyone else that he would be here for a long time. He believed that half the battle was mental, just as much as it was physical, and he proceeded to put up a heroic fight for several years. Although his prognosis would have meant instant retirement for many other people, Chip still had work to do. His will and spirit helped him fight back the cancer and he returned to Paradigm.

When Chip was well enough, I went out to visit him in Carmel, Calif., because he wanted to show me the area around his home he liked to photograph. While I knew that Chip was a gallery-level photographer and had even attended one of his openings in New York City, I didn't quite understand the craft of photography, although I was fascinated by it. Chip knew of my interest and was determined to show me a favorite muse, the California coastline near and around Big Sur. We spent the day driving around and taking in the spectacular views while Chip explained the various inspirations and techniques he employed to make his pictures. He took me to his studio/darkroom complex where I stood in awe as I absorbed the incredible process that entailed creating a picture. The amount of patience and attention to detail that he devoted to every photo was incredible. In our digital age where "more" is often more, Chip's approach to photography was painstakingly slow and deliberate. He often spent weeks in the darkroom refining a single photo until it was perfect. "Satisfactory" was not in his vocabulary.

Over the years, I began to see the influence that Chip's art had on his work as an agent and executive. The same vision, patience and attention to detail were crucial tools in building the touring careers of both Phish and DMB. He once said, "When you are willing to devote yourself to it, there can be bigger rewards than expected." While he was referring to his photography, those who knew Chip recognized that he applied that theory to everything in his life. From raising his two children to his friendships and his selfless mentoring of many young agents, promoters and managers (including me), Chip passionately pursued every moment of his life. To me, he was the Michael Jordan of life. Thank you, Chip. We will miss you.

Patrick Jordan



Peter Frampton

Acoustic Classics BY DEAN BUDNICK

"EACH TIME I'VE DONE A PROJECT recently, I've tried to challenge myself more and do different things within my music," Peter Frampton reflects on the origins of his new acoustic record. "It had been brought to my attention, 'What about the idea of doing something acoustic live?' I said, 'Oh, no, that's too scary—just me and an acoustic? No.' Then I started thinking about that and I thought, 'Well, why not? Let's give it a go—it's a challenge. That's what I want, so let's go out there and face my fears.'

"I started recording the album before I went on the acoustic tour. I have my own little studio in Nashville, and I came in the first day and started recording, but it wasn't pleasing to me. I said, 'Where's the band?' There was something missing, and that's because my approach was the same as if I had been playing these songs with the band, except they weren't there. So then I decided to try and capture the initial spirit when I first wrote and recorded these songs in an embryonic way. During this process, I got inspired and wrote one new one ['All Down to Me'], and we thought: 'It's a new classic,' so we stuck it on there."

FIG TREE BAY

In 1970, when I was still with Humble Pie, I went for vacation to Cyprus. "Fig Tree Bay" was the one that I wrote there. It was just the observation of the island and the serene peacefulness of being there for 10 days and being there with someone I was in love with, who ended up being my first wife.

That was one of the first tracks we did for *Wind of Change* at Olympic Studios—just a trio of myself on guitar and Rick Wills, who ended up being in Foreigner, on bass and Mike Kellie from Spooky Tooth on drums, who was the first drummer for Frampton's Camel. I remember I sang it live while we were recording it and there was too much live pickup in the room for us to keep the original vocal. I had to literally go back and listen to the scratch vocal and copy it. I was sort of writing it as we were recording it.

WIND OF CHANGE

"Wind of Change" was inspired by a guitar tuning that I first heard from Joni Mitchell. She would use a tuning, and it took me a while to work out that you can't play those chords on a regular tuning, on a regular strung guitar. I never really knew what tuning she was using but sort of guesstimated. I was always experimenting with tunings, so when I became friends with George Harrison and was working with him, I got to go down to his home and was able to check out the guitars and all the acoustics he had. This one tuning just sort of stuck out to me as being the strangest tuning I've ever heard, but it was very full sounding and yet high as well—it was low and high. I asked George what that was and he said it was just something he came up with. So I stole it from him and took it home and, lo and behold: "Wind of Change" in that George Harrison-specialized tuning.

ALL I WANT TO BE (IS BY YOUR SIDE)

This was the very last track from *Wind of Change*. I needed one more song, and we had a session booked for midday the following day, and I still didn't have anything. It was midnight and I called Chris Kimsey, the engineer/producer. I said, "I don't have anything; it's not happening." He said, "Look, relax, have a cup of tea and see what you can do." So I went back and, within the next couple of hours, I came up with "All I Want to Be"—the music and lyrics. I got to bed at about 4 or 5 o'clock, and I had no tape recorder, so I was just praying I would remember it in the morning.

I remember going into the studio that day and Mick Jones from Foreigner, a dear friend of mine from years before, was there, so I asked him to play guitar with me on it. So it's him and Rick Wills and Mike Kellie. It's very interesting because, at that time, we were having planned power cuts because of the fuel shortage in the early '70s. So one take was on regular power and one take was on a generator. When the power came back on, we played one after the other, and one was slightly faster because of the generator. It was all bizarre—there's even a line in the original that said, "This record's going slower." It was a challenge to get that one on tape because we didn't know if the power was going to go off while we were recording it.

SHOW ME THE WAY & BABY, I LOVE YOUR WAY

I want to group these two together because it's the only time I've ever written two songs that have been so important to me in the same day. I had gone

Continued on Page 73

9:30 Club – The Book

BY ROB SLATER

"I WAS A FUCKING KID, so I would stand in that hallway and watch my heroes walk by," Dave Grohl fondly remembers of his early show-going days in *9:30–The Book*, an elaborate pictorial history of one of Washington, D.C.'s most famed rock-and-roll haunts. "When you're standing in the hallway, and you see the singer of Void walk past you or the singer of Iron Cross standing there, you kind of freak out. That is our own weird rock-and-roll hall of fame."

The D.C.-area native came of age attending concerts at the 9:30 Club—one of the Mid-Atlantic Region's longest running and most influential performance spaces—and later graced the stage with Virginia hardcore punk rockers Scream and, of course, his iconic bands Nirvana and Foo Fighters. Throughout the comprehensive *9:30–The Book* rock-and-roll scrapbook, Grohl and a range of other musicians, club employees and fans tell the venue's story through photos, essays and reflections. Grohl even also shares an anecdote about getting thrown out of the dressing room by 10,000 Maniacs for smoking a joint.

Roger Gastman, the author and curator who sorted through over three decades of club snapshots, describes the process of compiling *9:30–The Book* as a "major task" for him and his team. "Digging up some of the best photography and stories was an amazing experience," he says of the 9:30 Club, which moved locations in 1996. "Some people dug in their parents' attics or through their ex-wives' garage. Others had the files ready to send over. Picking what we included was not easy." Elsewhere in the book, Gastman offers reflections from D.C. legends like Ian MacKaye—who rose to fame with Minor Threat and Fugazi before eventually helming the DIY crown jewel Dischord Records—Chuck D, Black Flag's Henry Rollins, Bob Mould, Thurston Moore, Britt Daniel and Robyn Hitchcock.

Gastman is quick to note that the 264-page book "easily could've been over a thousand pages" and also points out that the club's history is a "story it is still writing." "The images helped to tell the true story of 35 years of great music and friends," he says. "Flipping through the book just proves the legacy the 9:30 Club has paved for itself."

JAMES BROWN, 2005
Photo Credit: Joel Didriksen

AUDREY FIX SCHAEFER (COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR AT 9:30 CLUB): One thing you had to provide James Brown when he came to play was a sit-down hairdryer—the kind your grandmother used to use. The first two times he played with us, we rented it. But when it became clear he'd be a regular, our manager Ed Stack decided to buy one. Still today, in one of our storage closets sits the actual hairdryer that was used, time and time again, by the Godfather of Soul.

DAVE GROHL, MAY 5, 2014, BIG TONY'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Photo Credit: Erica Bruce

AFS: This was billed as a birthday celebration that Dave Grohl was throwing for go-go legend Big Tony of Trouble Funk. The Don't Need Its opened and nobody knew who they were until that night. It was a supergroup of D.C. punk legends: H.R. of Bad Brains, plus Pete Stahl and Dave Grohl from Scream. Dave was just a monster on drums.

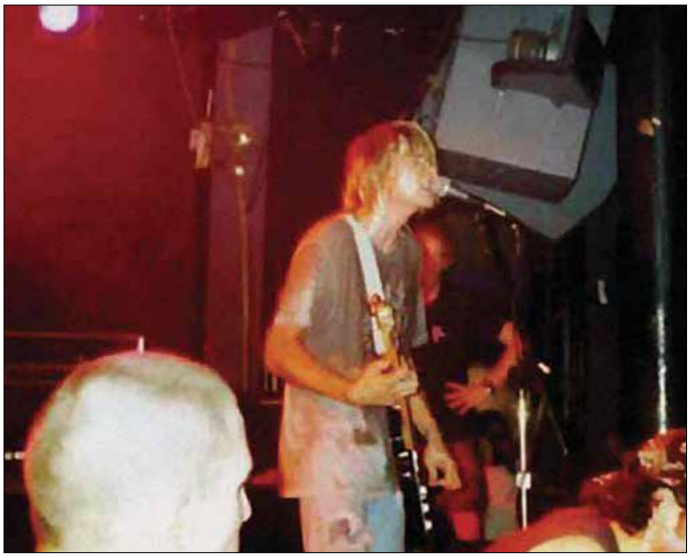
Then Trouble Funk played about two hours of sweaty, dance, fun music and everyone thought that was it and that would have been enough. It was 11 p.m. on a Monday night and it was a great show. But then Dave sauntered on with his turquoise guitar and said, "Would you mind if I play a couple of songs?" Then he said, "Who am I kidding? I don't mean a couple of songs, I mean a couple of hours!" The crowd went nuts. It was just him and his guitar alone on a dark stage, and he started to play "Times Like These." But when he started the chorus, the lights went up and on the stage was the entire band—all the Foos—and the people lost their minds.

Of course, partway through, Dave had to walk through the crowd, hop on the bar, take a shot of Jäger and play a five-minute guitar solo. They played 17 songs, ending with "Everlong." The show went past 1 a.m., so everyone who took the Metro was out of luck because the trains stop at midnight, but no one cared. The room was just filled with love and electricity. For days after, it felt like the whole town was walking on a cloud.

IAN MACKAYE, 1981

Photo Credit: Gary Cousin

SETH HURWITZ (CO-OWNER OF 9:30 CLUB): I hadn't seen Fugazi until they played the new 9:30 Club—even though they played the old club seven times and Ian MacKaye had been a runner for the venue. (One time, R.E.M. played at the Capital Centre and everyone had to wait to get their beers iced down while Ian and Michael Stipe had sit-down, cross-legged "indie talk.") But when I finally saw Fugazi play, I thought it was going to be all kinds of holier-than-thou minimalist nonsense, and then Fugazi went on, blew the doors off, and it was an absolute, intense essence of greatness and power. I just think of it and grind my teeth.



NIRVANA, OCT. 2, 1991

Photo Credit: Pat Ferrise

DONNA WESTMORELAND (COO AT 9:30 CLUB): When "Smells Like Teen Spirit" came out, I'd never seen a group of people affected by a song the way the club's staff was at the time. We used to have a live DJ every night before and between the bands, and they would play "Smells Like Teen Spirit" at least once every time. Everyone knew every single lyric, and this was the whole summer. That show was in October, and it was the day or the day after [*Nevermind*] was released, and everybody was just so excited to be there.

I was the production manager at the time, and we happened to have another show elsewhere that date. So I was at the Citadel Center, which was probably a 2-3,000 capacity space, where we had a sold-out show with Jesus Jones. It was really a snapshot of the early '90s because we had this sort of Britpop, happy, boy-joy band playing at the Citadel Center, and only a few of us from the staff were there. I was first to come and last to go, so I wasn't able to go see Nirvana. But, by all accounts, it was momentous. It was more than a show; it was really the launching of grunge. That whole group of people were what made grunge what it was, and they took that first show and just rolled with it. It was pretty amazing.

We did a lot more Nirvana shows, but they weren't in that intimate of a setting. I saw Nine Inch Nails there and that was amazing, and I remember some of those shows very fondly. Before they had big production, it was raw, and that's what was so great about the club.

HUNT SALES, LINDA HEINECKE, SETH HURWITZ, DAVID BOWIE AND RICH HEINECKE, 1991

Photo Credit: 9:30 Club

DW: I, of course, knew who David Bowie was, but I didn't really know much about Tin Machine. We were just so excited we were going to be doing a show with Bowie. This was at the Citadel Center again, the same place where that Jesus Jones show was. I don't remember the performance as much, but I remember being so excited David Bowie was going to be there. I went home and got my cappuccino machine because their rider asked for one. That picture of him and Rich—he was always happy to just hang out and chat. There was no pretense or rock-star nonsense because this was a strange venue and a weird place, and he was being a person in a band of that size. He just thought, "This is my gig right now. I'm a member of this band Tin Machine without the trappings of stardom. There are nice people here putting on our show and I'm going to be nice to them." And he really did hang around—it wasn't just "whisk in and whisk out." And the show, from what I remember, was colorful and fun. It was Bowie as a person.

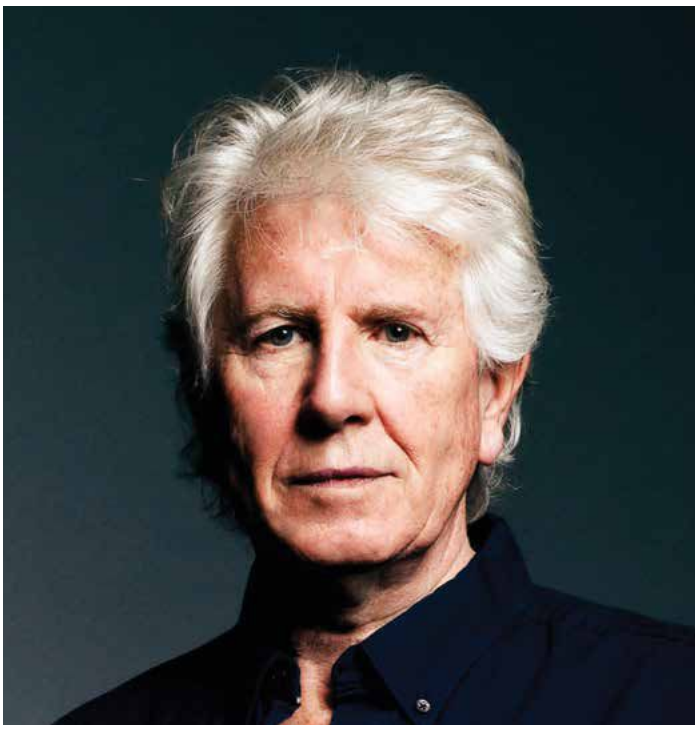
Graham Nash

After a lifetime on the road with Crosby, Stills and sometimes Young, CSN's gentle soul offers a deeply personal solo encore BY MIKE GREENHAUS

"AS A MUSICIAN, I'VE ALWAYS reacted to my life—from the moment I open up my eyes," Graham Nash says while prepping to release his sixth solo record, *This Path Tonight*, on a cold winter afternoon a few weeks into the new year. "This album is a document of a journey that I'm taking late in my life that's stunning to me and that's inevitable. I'm on a new path. I'll be 74 in less than a month, providing I make it, of course. This is quite a journey for me. The music of *This Path Tonight* reflects that."

It's been 14 years since Nash released a solo album, and though he's remained busy on the road and, occasionally, in the studio with Crosby, Stills & Nash and the Crosby & Nash duo, *This Path Tonight* is his most personal effort in some time. The intensely intimate batch of songs is likely the result of a late-in-life crossroads that's unexpectedly forced him to look inward—Nash recently separated from his wife—and step into his encore years on his own terms.

Most of CSNY's recent headlines in the press have concerned intra-band squabbles stemming from Crosby's comments about Neil Young's relationship with Daryl Hannah and a personal dispute between Crosby and Nash. Nash is quick to point out that he remains close with his band's perennial fourth member. "I spoke to Neil about two-and-a-half weeks ago, when he had his birthday—and at his birthday party," Nash says, brushing aside his involvement in that spat. However, he remains adamant that he does not want to work with Crosby—his closest musical partner for many years—and told *Billboard* that, "In my world, there will never, ever be a Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young record, and there will never be another Crosby, Stills & Nash record or show." A representative for Nash confirmed to *Relix* that he stands by his comments.



Nash has always been responsible for some of CSN's gentlest ballads and most universally well-known folk-pop gems, and the songs on *This Path Tonight* feel like natural extensions of "Marrakesh Express," "Teach Your Children" and "Our House."

"It's a question of whether the music will last," Nash says of his process, which seems to parallel his quest for inner happiness and the decision to step out on his own. "Every song that I play for you has got to get past me first. I'm my worst critic in many ways. So, I think the idea of *This Path Tonight* is: 'Let's start this journey and let's go to the encore.'"

You wrote *This Path Tonight* during a relatively circumscribed period of time. What inspired this swift approach?

When Crosby, Stills & Nash or CSNY go on the road, we each have our own bus—our own little atmosphere. We travel in our little bubbles, but we do share some space with other musicians. For instance, our keyboard player Todd Caldwell will go on Stephen's bus. I have Shane Fontayne, who is the second guitar player in the Crosby, Stills & Nash band, on my bus. It's very hard to come down after a show sometimes—you've been adored by thousands and you get into these special feelings, and then, all of a sudden, there's nobody there. So, we often go into the back of the bus and play guitar and, in a month, Shane and I wrote 20 songs together. Then, we came off the road, had Christmas, went into the studio and recorded 20 songs with a full rock-and-roll band. Though, for a couple of tracks, we actually used the demo that we made on the bus.

You've described "Back Home" as a tribute to Levon Helm, but you have also said that you hope the song has a universal feel. Can you elaborate on that track's duality?

When Shane and I heard that Levon was close to passing, we decided to celebrate his life with a song, as well as physically mourn his passing, because Levon Helm was an incredible singer and an incredible songwriter and an incredible drummer and an incredible person. He played drums on "Fieldworker," which was a song of mine from the past. Part of the art of being a songwriter is to take an incident—what was happening with Levon and what was happening in my life—and turn it into a song that everybody can understand.

Especially in the age of technology and instant gratification, listeners are searching for that sense of universalism, as well as a visceral sincerity and authenticity in music.

There's a lot of that on this album. The version of "Myself at Last" we included is our first attempt at that song. We did a few other takes but eventually went back to the original. That raw emotion—I love that, it gets me every time. It's real. I want to get you as close to the flame—the moment of creation—as possible given the technology. We want to record something right to tape, mix it, press it to vinyl and let you hear it. We want to put you right there, as close to the moment of the recording as possible. There have been so many times when I've sat there in the studio for hours, plugging away at shitty music, and then the band just comes in and plays and makes sure everything is going on the right track.

Though not a traditional concept album, *This Path Tonight* feels like a collective statement. Do you see a particular thread that ties these songs together?

For some reason, this bunch of songs sounded incredibly personal to me. And so I just ran with it. And Shane, who

produced the album, did a fantastic job. I really love the audio quality on the record. I love the arrangements, I love the solos. So, the thread is that basically I'm the same as every other human being walking the planet. I'm doing something with my life that I've been doing for years, and I'm incredibly grateful and lucky to be a musician. Holy shit, what would I have been if I hadn't turned to music? Holy Toledo, I have no idea!

I write from my life, and I think that's the thread between all my songs. They're stories that have happened to me. That's all I can write about—things that happen to me or that I see around me. I look in the newspaper and I see the fact that 128 Tibetan monks have burned themselves to death over the last year and a half because of the conflict that's going on between the Chinese government and the Tibetan people—or Michael Brown being shot in Missouri. Shane and I wrote a song called "Watch Out for the Wind"—which is on the deluxe, iTunes version of the album—the morning that we heard that Michael Brown was shot dead. My point is that I write from my life, and that's the thread connecting all my albums.

After all these years of playing with Stephen and David, can you instinctively hear their parts when you are writing—even for a solo recording?

Yes, and "Back Home" is a particular example of that. Before my solo tour, CSN played that song and it had this slight Bob Marley feel to it. It was a rock-and-roll song. When we were recording my album, Shane came to me and said, "Do you remember our demo that we made on the bus?" And I said, "No, truly I don't. Play it for me." When we got to the end, I said, "Holy shit." Sometimes you have to chase the demo—you wake up at three in the morning and you've got this idea, you go down to your little studio and you put it down. Then you try and do that song with the band and you can't get that feeling that you had at three in the morning when you're half asleep. Many times, we've had to overdub to the demo because the demo had that *feel*.

A happier CSNY in 1974

Before you started recording *This Path Tonight*, you worked on a series of CSN-related box sets and wrote your autobiography, *Wild Tales: A Rock & Roll Life*. Did those retrospective projects shape your new batch of songs?

It was a lot of looking back. I did David's box set with Joel Bernstein, and then we did Stephen's box set and my box set and the CSN-wide box set from '74. Then I wrote *Wild Tales*. One of the things that happened is that, when I wrote the bio, I felt like, "That was my life. Fantastic, everyone had a good time. Great, good night." But I've got another path here. And I'm gonna blaze my lane to my future. And that's what these songs represented to me. It's like the song "Encore"—that was recorded in one take, and I particularly like the way that song feels.

You appear on David Gilmour's new album *Rattle That Lock* and also sang on his previous release, 2006's *On an Island*. How has your friendship evolved?

I've been a fan of Pink Floyd since the mid-to-late '60s. Gilmour's a brilliant musician. He is one of the tastiest guitar players I know. He can make one note last for bars and bars and bars and bars. He's like Neil in that way, although Neil is much more rugged. Crosby and I were playing this show at the Royal Festival Hall in London with our band, and Gilmour came back after the show to talk and said, "I've got two things: One, I've got this song called 'On an Island,' and I want you and David to sing on it. And two, I'm stealing your drummer," which he also did. Now Steve DiStanislao plays with Gilmour, too. I have great respect for David Gilmour, and any time he wants me to sing with him, I am right there.

Speaking of backstage interactions, Trey Anastasio recently told a story about attending a CSNY show right after Big Cypress. When you met him backstage, your first words were: "Congratulations on your success. Don't fuck it up." Do you remember that encounter?

Of course—the legacy of Phish and the Grateful Dead has always been interesting, musically. But I recognized that Trey is a great, great guitar player and that Phish had the ability to go on and draw 100,000 people to a concert on a mere rumor. That kind of success—that kind of power in terms of communicating music to people who love it—that's what I told him not to fuck up. He has *that* power, and he's a great musician, of course.

There's been talk of a Rick Rubin-produced CSN album of cover songs for years. What's the status of that project?

Here's what happened with the covers album: We started it with our group and with Sony. We got about seven tracks into it and it just started to not work out between Rick and, in particular, David. So we went into Jackson Browne's studio in Santa Monica and re-recorded a few songs. And there's two or three that we really like. We will get to it. [*Ed. note:* Nash made his comment before his fight with Crosby went public.] We've just been working together a lot for the last couple of years. I mean, it took me four years of my life to do this CSNY box set. My point is that I need a rest from David and Stephen. I need a rest from that music. I need to concentrate on this new journey that I'm on.

Shifting from recording to touring, you've been on the road as a solo act. What does that more personal situation offer that CSN doesn't?

In many cases, these shows are just me with the acoustic or electric guitar, or me with the piano. That allows you to take a song and break it down to the very essence of how it was created. When you take a song right down to its basics, with nothing in the way, you either have a good song or you don't. There are no strings, no choruses coming in, none of the rest of the shit you put on records to hide the songs. One of the joys is seeing the faces of the audience and the very fact that you're communicating with them. They're understanding that they're watching a human being and they're watching a human being going through life's changes just like they are. I think that's a compliment—that I can express myself and expose myself and have people understand. In many cases, they're going through the same changes I am.

I almost sculpt the setlist like a journey. I go from The Hollies to early CSN, to late CSN to David's and my music, to my music, including songs that may have been written that morning. I see it very clearly: I'm 74, and my life is a journey. I'm loving this ride.

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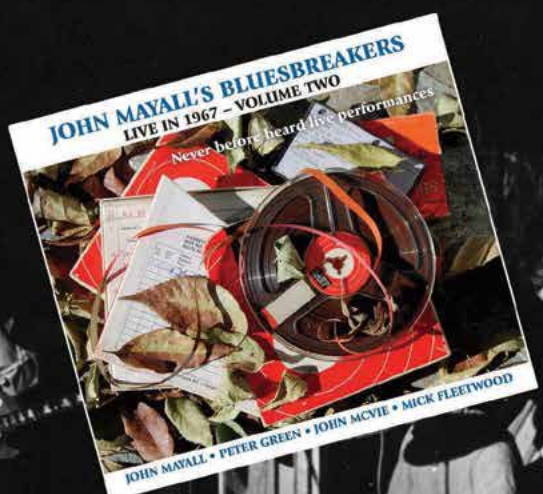
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Rising in Reverse

Lake Street Dive have found viral fame, rubbed elbows with label bigwigs and carved their own space somewhere between soul and disco. Yet, they're still committed to a true self-portrait.

BY MATT INMAN

Soul siblings: Mike Calabrese, Rachael Price, Bridget Kearney, Mike Olson(l-r)

IN LATE 2012, THE FOUR members of Lake Street Dive hunkered down at a farmhouse studio in rural Maine to record the songs that would make up *Bad Self Portraits*. With no cell phone service or Internet to connect them to the outside world, the band found the solitude necessary to focus on what would become their breakthrough album. But when they returned to civilization, they discovered that their world had changed while they were away from it.

"That's when the 'I Want You Back' video went viral," lead vocalist Rachael Price remembers, enjoying a kale salad at one of her favorite Brooklyn cafés. The video in question was of the quartet performing their stripped-down, jazz-club reimagining of the Jackson 5 classic on a street corner in a Boston suburb. Showcasing the band's musicianship and tight harmonies along with Price's powerhouse vocals, the video had recently been rolled out in support of their EP of mostly covers, *Fun Machine*. Though originally envisioned as a fun between-albums project, the EP and subsequent video served as surprise introductions for many new Lake Street Dive fans.

"We get out of the studio and we're getting all of this attention on the Internet," Price says. "Then we look at our shows that are booked, and our manager's like, 'All your shows are sold out for the next month.'"

"We were like, 'Thank God, 'cause we all just quit our jobs!'" adds bassist Bridget Kearney from across the communal café table.

Lake Street Dive wasn't always the four musicians' main focus, however. Each member hails from a distinctively different region of the country—Price and Kearney are from Tennessee and Iowa, respectively, guitarist/trumpeter Mike "McDuck" Olson grew up in Minneapolis (the city that inspired Lake Street Dive's name) and drummer Mike Calabrese hails from Philadelphia. The group coalesced at Boston's New England Conservatory of Music in 2003 and formed Lake Street Dive the following year. They stuck together after graduating from their programs, but Lake Street Dive was far from their only artistic concern.

"There was definitely a commitment to the band continuing on as a creative venture, but we were all involved in other musical projects, too, and had jobs," Price says. "We hadn't had a conversation yet about it being our sole focus, or whether it ever would be our sole focus, but we were pretty committed to doing as many shows as possible."

"Maybe it was because we were coming from the jazz world," Kearney says about the members' multitasking. The bassist, who served as the band's booker in those salad days, moved to New York City just after college and commuted back to Boston to play gigs with the other members. She also pulled double duty as a member of the now-defunct bluegrass outfit Joy Kills Sorrow, which featured current Yonder Mountain String Band mandolinist Jacob Jolliff. In 2012, she left the band before its ultimate breakup to devote her time to Lake Street Dive.

"We were still figuring out what it meant to have a career as a musician," Kearney adds. "None of us would've said to ourselves right out of college, 'Let's all quit our jobs and be in only one band!' That's just not the way that we were used to doing it. In college, we were all in 15 bands and worked jobs, so it just kind of continued in that pattern. Then this group grew to the point where we were able to devote ourselves fully to it."

It was only before the *Bad Self Portrait* sessions that the band came to the conclusion that this was the project to focus on. "It just started to feel like, if we didn't commit to it wholly, we would never really see the full potential," Price says. "I'd been doing a solo jazz thing, but I felt like I'd spent enough time pursuing that. I knew that Lake Street Dive was going to be the most creative outlet in my life."

Spurred on by that viral video's success, the band started to nurture a national audience in the months leading up to *Portraits*' 2014 release, and they quickly climbed the venue ladder, translating their Internet fame into real-life success. "It was just really exciting, really affirming," Price confirms. "Luckily, we'd been playing shows as often as we could, so our live act was really developed. We were ready to present what we had been doing for so long to a larger group of people. We were kind of like, 'Hell, yeah, this is great! We've been practicing for 80 years and now people are coming to our shows!'"

> "It just started to feel like, if we didn't commit to it wholly, we would never really see the full potential. I'd been doing a solo jazz thing, but I felt like I'd spent enough time pursuing that. I knew that Lake Street Dive was going to be the most creative outlet in my life."
> RACHAEL PRICE

"It's kinda like if you were in love with someone and your parents didn't want you to marry them, or you were a part of some conservative community that was like, 'No, that'll never work out,' but you're always like, 'Well, I know this is my true love,'" Kearney says. "Then, *eventually*, down the road, it was like, '*Wow*, people are actually OK with this? I can just do this for my job?' That's what it was like to realize that it was possible to make a living doing this unusual, creative style of music that I never thought there would be a market for."

LAKE STREET DIVE FACED A WEALTH OF expectations from fans and critics alike leading into the sessions for their latest album, *Side Pony*, and, luckily, they had the songs to back them up. Their fourth studio album, which they unveiled in February, is a powerhouse collection of tunes that range from dance-floor disco to cocktail-lounge crooning. Each member contributed their own compositions to the release, a tribute to the fact that, while Lake Street Dive might be a "greater than the sum of its parts" situation, each of those parts carry significant weight.

With new label Nonesuch in their corner, the band upgraded pretty much all aspects of the recording process for *Side Pony*. "We were able to pick the producer we wanted, go into a pretty professional studio setting for us, get a very prominent engineer to do it," Price says. "Those were things we never had considered before." That producer is Dave Cobb, who recently helmed Jason Isbell's Grammy-winning *Something More Than Free*. Cobb, in turn, brought on engineer Darrell Thorp. "That was kind of dreamlike," Price continues. "We hear from Dave, and he was like, 'Is it OK if we use this guy?' And we were like, 'Yeah! He made our favorite Beck records!' It's crazy that he's the guy that's in the studio with us."

Besides his ample experience, Cobb also offered a game plan for the recording process, tasking each member of Lake Street Dive with bringing in their own songs in no-frills, demo-only versions, which turned *Side Pony* into the band's most collaborative effort yet. "Even the ones that we had played live, we stripped bare of all of the elements of production and sent him demos that were just guitar and Rachael's singing," Kearney says. "We call it campfire style—just like the four of us sitting around a campfire, strumming the tune. That left us in the studio with a lot more room to build them as a band and be really collaborative about how the arrangements were going to come together."

It was a decidedly different process than with *Bad Self Portraits*. "We're doing

everything in reverse," says Price. "You [usually] get ready to go into the studio and you know the songs and play them live, and they're just under your fingers, and then you go in and just lay 'em down. So to reverse that process and create those songs in the studio—playing them for the first time all together in a room with just two other people—it's going to change the way that you play because you're inventing these songs in a completely different context."

Despite the collaborative studio process, almost all of the tracks on the album were developed out of the band member's individual ideas, giving *Side Pony* a multifaceted perspective throughout. "There are four writers, so if we're writing an album that heavily features love songs, and songs about being in love and not being in love, and wishing you were in love, you're going to get a lot of varied perspective on it," says Kearney. "It's coming from the same voice, but it's four people that are experiencing things in different ways. Also, just having two guys and two girls in the band is a strength in perspective for us, as far as writing lyrics and getting everybody's side of the story. The album probably could be a little bit jarring, back and forth sometimes 'cause we're definitely all in different situations. But that's part of the beauty of it."

"It's coming from the same voice, but it's four people that are experiencing things in different ways," Bridget Kearney says of the band's communal approach.

This dynamic can yield interesting songwriting results, like "I Don't Care About You"—a rocking tune with dismissive lyrics written by Calabrese—juxtaposed with "So Long," a yearning ballad penned by Kearney. And then there's the title track, which, judging by the name, seems like it would have come from Kearney—who frequently rocks a side ponytail hairstyle herself—but was actually written by Olson. "It was inspired because his wife had a side pony at their wedding—which happened right before the second recording session," Price explains.

"Dave Cobb, at one point after we recorded the song, was like, 'Man, why'd you write a song about a side pony?'" Kearney says. "And McDuck was like, "Cause my fuckin' wife was wearin' one at my fuckin' wedding!'"

"He was an inspired man deeply, deeply in love," adds Price. "He was a blushing newlywed that couldn't help but write a song about a side ponytail."

LAKE STREET DIVE'S INFLUENCES are plentiful, to be sure, but the band's sound, while frequently described as indie pop, has always leaned heavily on classic soul and R&B for inspirations. And with acts like Alabama Shakes, Sharon Jones and Leon Bridges leading a soul revival over the last half decade or so, Lake Street Dive are coming up at just right time.

"As far as us playing soul music and that revival, it was definitely a lucky coincidence that they overlapped and happened simultaneously because, all of a sudden, there were these artists in the forefront, and people were getting into that music again. People like Amy Winehouse," Price says, mentioning one of the artists who began the whole new-soul movement.

"I love that style of music. I grew up listening to it and it's a big influence for me, vocally, which helped turn the band in that direction—I so wanted to sing in that style," Price continues, citing Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin and Sam Cooke as some of her biggest influences.

"It's funny how styles and musical gestures go in and out of fashion," says Kearney. "It's like, what's the most awesome music if you're sitting in your living room and you're like, 'What's gonna be so good and make me feel awesome?' It's gonna be, like, a Sam Cooke record or something. And then, all these Jackson 5 songs have these amazing, melodic basslines that are integral and part of the song, and why doesn't anybody do that? So you take these little ideas from everything and make them your own."

On *Side Pony*, however, the band mixes in a new style, too, nodding to disco most notably on lead single "Call Off Your Dogs," which has a very Jackson 5-esque verse—complete with one of those melodic bass-lines that Kearney mentioned—that builds to a chorus taken straight from the '70s.

"We love dance music. We love to make people dance. But we definitely didn't go into the studio like, 'Guys—disco. Disco's gonna be the next thing we try,'" Price says. "More than that, we went in being like, '*Nothing* is not in our wheelhouse. Let's not tether ourselves to any sort of groove or type. Any song can be a Lake Street Dive song for this album.' That's kind of how the disco snuck in."

"I love disco!" says Kearney. "But I'm also surprised how specific people's associations with disco are. To me, it's just a really awesome beat. It's just a drum beat! People have this association with pop culture, when it was popular, how it killed rock music and whatever. But it's just upbeat!"

And Lake Street Dive aren't about to let others' opinions stop them from making the music they love to make. "Whatever is exciting to you in the moment," Kearney says. And exciting is as good a word as any to describe the music that this band produces, both in the studio and on the stage.

"There's some quote of someone being like, 'Your job as an artist is to stay excited about art,'" Kearney says. "That's gonna drive your creations to be really genuine and original—if you're really, fully psyched about what your tools are and what you're making with them. That's going to make the product the best it can be."

How Deadhead academics and a group of rogue scholars helped ignite Heads: A Biography of Psychedelic America

BY JESSE JARNOW

The Deadologists

THEY DESCEND ON Albuquerque like the Deadheads that they are, but their destination involves neither concerts by members of the Grateful Dead, nor any other band. This particular seasonal migration of Dead freakdom has been going on for 20 years now, unfailingly, each February. Those arriving the night before meet up to exchange secret Deadhead handshakes, but mostly they'll start to gather bleary-eyed over the breakfast buffet or in a conference room in the morning. Somewhere around 30 or 40 of them file in, sometimes as early as 8 a.m. (on a Saturday!) for presentations, roundtables and discussions. The Grateful Dead academic caucus at the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association is in session.

The opening panel this year includes a dive by Laura Meriwether into the specific Funk & Wagnalls entry from which the band drew their name and how "Grateful Dead" came to be in that dictionary in the first place, when the phrase wasn't in the OED or elsewhere. Jan Wright describes her project to create an index for the beloved and info-packed '80s Deadhead zine *The Golden Road*. Also on the agenda for day one: the Dead and third-wave feminism (featuring Rhoney Stanley, LSD lab assistant to her partner Owsley), an update on the Israeli Deadhead scene and a half-dozen other presentations.

I have official conference business, too, but I'd be there even if I didn't. I am there because, to twist Willy Legate's famous saying: *There is nothing like a Grateful Dead conference*.

"We're really right at the point where we've achieved critical mass, where there's enough good work done in different fields to have a sense of: 'This is really robust. This is really interesting,'" says Nicholas Meriwether, a conference attendee and organizer since its early days, a Deadhead since 1985, and historian in charge of the Grateful Dead's official archive at UC Santa Cruz since 2010. He cites 26 different disciplines that've been applied to the burgeoning multidisciplinary field of Dead studies. "There's a real rigor and ambition and excellence in the band's craft that is really the core of why Dead studies exists," he says, "and the fact that it happens to ripple outward in so many interesting ways and contexts makes it even more compelling."

Dick Latvala and one of his trusty tape notebooks in the '70s.

Like other Deadhead sub-communities, the scholars of the Albuquerque caucus take on qualities of both groups—in this case, Deadhead passion (and humor) mixed with academic methodology. In the entirety of the SWPACA conference with its hundreds of attendees, the Dead caucus is the only group that meets full-time for the entirety of the four days.

A whole academic rainbow prisms outward from the Dead's Steal Your Face logo. There are sociologists, economists, feminists, philosophers, historians, poets, radio hosts and more. Nick Meriwether wishes there were more anthropologists. One group that seems especially poised to take flight is the musicologists, a sub-tribe studying the band's proper text, the music itself. Their literature includes, to name one shining example, Graeme Boone's lyrical explorations of "Dark Star" and "Bird Song," and other topics. But perhaps at the foundation of Dead studies lies the only marginally recognized field of Deadology.

To really understand the United States, you need to understand the '60s, Nick Meriwether told me (approximately) when I was researching at the Grateful Dead Archive in Santa Cruz a few years back. *And in order to understand the '60s, you have to understand San Francisco. And in order to understand San Francisco, you have to understand the Haight, and in order to understand the Haight, you have to understand the Grateful Dead.*

This is the *why* of Dead studies and Deadology: the deep study of the Grateful Dead in order to *really understand* the Grateful Dead and, by extension, everything else. Not that most Deadologists would frame their own obsessions as such. Many perhaps stop after the first part, but there is the usually unspoken agreement that the Grateful Dead were, and are, one of the most remarkable phenomena of the last 100 years. "Better than Beethoven!" legendary Dead collector Dick Latvala was known to bellow. One of the first collectors, Latvala kept carefully annotated notebooks of his acquisitions with careful metadata about the recordists, tape generation, and more, in addition to his own close listening notes. But Latvala didn't trade tapes, exactly, so much as send delicious Hawaiian weed to Dead tapers in return for reels. It worked like a charm, and frames the late great Dick into the great American narrative of the underground hip economy that welded drugs to rock and roll.

Primarily because of obsessives like Dick Latvala, Deadology is the oldest and most matured of all the subdisciplines in Dead studies. Being an imaginary field, it requires no specific academic status to enter, only that one do good work, and Deadheads have been doing good work in that regard since the the early '70s. The origin point and bedrock for all Deadology is (perhaps, obviously) the band's obsessive tape collectors—two of them started this publication in 1974—who began to piece together the band's hundreds of concert dates in search of *all the reels*. By the '80s came *DeadBase*, the infamous phonebook-sized framework of Dead setlists whose master chronology doubles as a meaningful history of a certain not-insignificant segment of the American population.

That's my argument, anyway, (COMMERCIAL MESSAGE HERE) and I spend a few hundred pages explaining it in my new book, *Heads: A Biography of Psychedelic America*, showing how the

Dead's timeline was entwined with that of LSD, technology, and other neon red, white and blue threads. And while I had a magical time this year, as always, in the heady high-altitude environs of the Albuquerque conference, the thought that kept returning to me was how the first generations of Deadologists had provided a basis for so many of the presentations.

For anyone relying on lyric transcriptions (the Stanford heads put Dead lyrics on the national ARPANET as early as 1975) or dated concert recordings (such as musicologist Graeme Boone's evocation of McCoy Tyner's exact influence on Bob Weir; see "The Same Thing," 11/29/66), it was the Deadologists' sense of history that made the conversation possible.

And what struck me at the end of the conference is how young Dead studies is as a field, how much exciting work is left to be done in Deadology alone, and how much is unfolding right now, every week, in blogs and comment sections and Facebook threads**,** in addition to the more slowly accumulating academic canon. It is a confirmation of the Dead's unceasing appeal, of the infinite depth behind the Steal Your Face lightning bolt, both symbolically and historically.

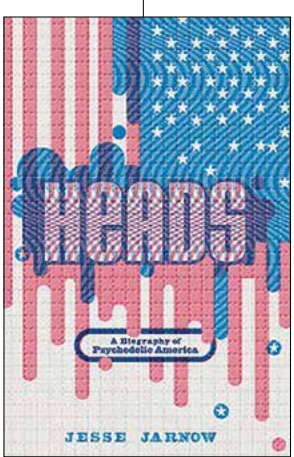
Refined in the early '70s, the famed skull logo was conceived by LSD chemist, soundman and Dead patron Owsley Stanley, and drawn by Bob Thomas, LSD lab assistant and co-founder of the Golden Toad, the free-floating acoustic world-music collective that became known as the Grateful Dead of the Renaissance Faire circuit. Not all roads lead to the Grateful Dead, and the Grateful Dead don't lead everywhere, but not all roads are known.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, "DON'T READ THE comments" is sound advice in the digital age, but one corner of the Internet where comments are not only civilized but also essential, are the Grateful Dead historical blogs. In the 21st century, they are the natural habitat for a new species of Deadologist. With most of the band's live tapes recovered, cataloged and remastered by professional and amateur audio enthusiasts, on official Dead releases or fan sites alike, what's left to discover is information. And while the Dead's body of music might be finite, information about the musicians and their recordings could conceivably turn out not to be. A group of loosely affiliated Deadologists have begun to make maps to find out if this is true.

At the broadest is the Grateful Dead Guide who (to name a few examples) have attempted to reconstruct Jerry Garcia's record collection, The Warlocks' 1965 repertoire, and the exact studio overdubs on *Europe '72*. They've assembled complete lists of studio outtakes, presented simple sourced biographies of oddball figures in the band's lore, untangled myths, and much more. The Guide's Dead Sources appendix is strictly devoted to reposting archival articles from 1965-1975, with detailed comment section annotations by site proprietor Caleb Kennedy. For one post, Kennedy used Google Translate and a knowledge of Jerry Garcia's idiomatic Californian English to recover an interview published in French during the band's visit to France in 1971.

"It's kind of a fluke that I have a Dead blog rather than a Beatles blog or Hendrix blog," observes Kennedy, who only came to the Dead in the early 2000s. "But part of that is because those guys have an extensive literature already, while the Dead had scarcely been written about yet in a substantial in-depth way. You know how a writer likes discovering virgin territory to speak! I'm a little surprised that, a lot of the field, I still have to myself. I thought by now more Dead fans would be doing this, but they aren't quite as fanatical as I thought."

If that sounds like a challenge, then it is, especially the word "substantial," given the enormous shelf of extant Dead books, including—but not limited to—a half-dozen new titles last year, not to mention the three-volume *Deadhead's Taping Compendium*. But Kennedy's point is extremely well-taken, since his work docket is already overloaded, and he's only dealing with the band's first 10 and most psychedelic years, leaving two decades wide open for anybody else.



"All the current different Dead scholars, whether journalists or bloggers, have loosely marked out distinct, if overlapping, territory," says Corry Arnold, who runs Lost Live Dead and Hooterollin'. "In general, I have benefitted greatly from them sharing information, correcting errors, and commenting on my blog. I try to be as helpful as I can to others. This cooperation is one of the things that makes the Grateful Dead an ongoing, vibrant enterprise."

Arnold, especially, steers away from thorny topics. He wants people to feel welcome to fill in the blanks, to come out of the woodwork and join the conversation with memories or even fragments. All of the Grateful Dead blogs work on this principle, but especially Arnold's self-described "rock prosopography," which builds bigger histories of Bay Area folkie circles. Like Kennedy, Arnold has a firm belief in the Internet's long tail.

With clear post titles, the blogs put their information square into the Googleable universe. If there's a question about a specific show, then perhaps eventually the answer will come looking for itself. A pair of posts about the Dead's first trip to New York in 1967 yielded comments from both former Dead manager Rock Scully and a member of the Group Image, the psychedelic commune located on New York's East Village who bonded, jammed and shared bills with the Dead.

It was here that the blogs became especially useful to me when researching my book; in this case, looking for signs of how the Dead's Haight-born psychedelia met the East Village's rough-and-ready interpretation on that first trip east, and how those two ideologies connected or differed. I learned (from the *Village Voice* archive) that there'd been a hippie-cop riot days before the Dead came to town. And who'd invited them to play for free in Tompkins Square Park? Did underground New York's radical head ambassadors The Fugs play, too, as Jerry Garcia once remembered? They're not mentioned in any of the newspaper accounts. The questions kept asking themselves.

It was in the comments sections where the community aspect of Grateful Dead fandom reasserted itself, missing from the experience of streaming the Dead's music through Spotify or listentothedead.com. My own comments section queries turned into emails, which have turned into long-running correspondences.

Corry Arnold's been at it a long time. He first saw the band in San Francisco in 1972, and began seriously researching by the late '70s, eventually landing a copy of the so-called Soto List, a pre-*DeadBase* printout of known Dead dates. Arnold "called the Grateful Dead Hotline every week—as we all did—but unlike everyone else, I wrote down and kept a list of every Garcia, Weir, and other spin-off band date. I also accumulated what information I could from old magazines and tape boxes about Garcia and Weir dates in the '70s." When *DeadBase VII* arrived in 1993 with GarciaBase and WeirBase, "the entire show list was mine, complete with my formatting and my mistakes," says Arnold.

Another long-practicing Deadologist is Ihor Slabicky. Working from his home in Ridgewood, Queens, Slabicky's first serious

Continued on Page 77

An Exclusive Excerpt from the Blues Traveler Co-Founder's New Autobiography

BY JOHN POPPER WITH DEAN BUDNICK

Dropping Some MSG

IN JOHN Popper's new memoir, *Suck & Blow: And Other Stories I'm Not Supposed to Tell*, the Blues Traveler frontman shares a candid, spirited account of his life and career. Written with *Relix* Editor-in-Chief Dean Budnick, the book chronicles how Popper, a "straight-F student" at Princeton High School, changed his life with one serendipitous harmonica solo that captured the attention of his mercurial band teacher. (The same teacher whose life was later fictionalized in the Academy Award-winning film *Whiplash*.) It goes on to explore the formation of Blues Traveler, the band's early days in the lower Manhattan music scene of the late 1980s (including a stint as the initial house band at Wetlands Preserve), the guidance of first manager Bill Graham, Popper's role as co-founder of the H.O.R.D.E. tour, the development and impact of the multi-platinum *four* album, and his many subsequent travels and travails in the realms of music, politics and Hollywood.

The Allman Brothers Band, Phish, Spin Doctors, Eddie Vedder, Howard Stern, Bruce Willis, Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray, David Letterman and the Clintons all figure into the musician's journey; and Popper doesn't hold back when discussing his longstanding battle with obesity, the untimely death of founding Blues Traveler bassist Bobby Sheehan, and his recovery from angioplasty and gastric bypass surgery.

In the following excerpt, Popper reflects on his band's headlining gig at Madison Square Garden on Dec. 31, 1996.

As New York musicians who grew up in New Jersey, we always lived in the shadow of Madison Square Garden. We never imagined that we'd have the opportunity to play there. No, we imagined it, but that goal seemed very distant from reality. But as my conquest maps and road fantasies seemed to remind me, we were never too tethered to reality anyhow.

Our first opportunity to play MSG came through the Spin Doctors. They were at the peak of their popularity with *Pocket Full of Kryptonite* when they asked us to join forces on a show at the illustrious venue. More specifically, they asked us to *open* a show for them at the illustrious venue. It wasn't that bad an offer, and they couldn't understand why we wouldn't do it.

It was weird watching them get huge because they were our little brothers. We had it set in our minds that they would always open for us. They had different ideas, though. I can remember, before their record hit, when I came to see them at a gig, they each pulled out an article they had saved that described them as "Blues Traveler's favorite opening band." They had saved it with a purpose, and if I were them, then I would have also saved it with a purpose.

But MSG was a hill we wanted to assault on our own.

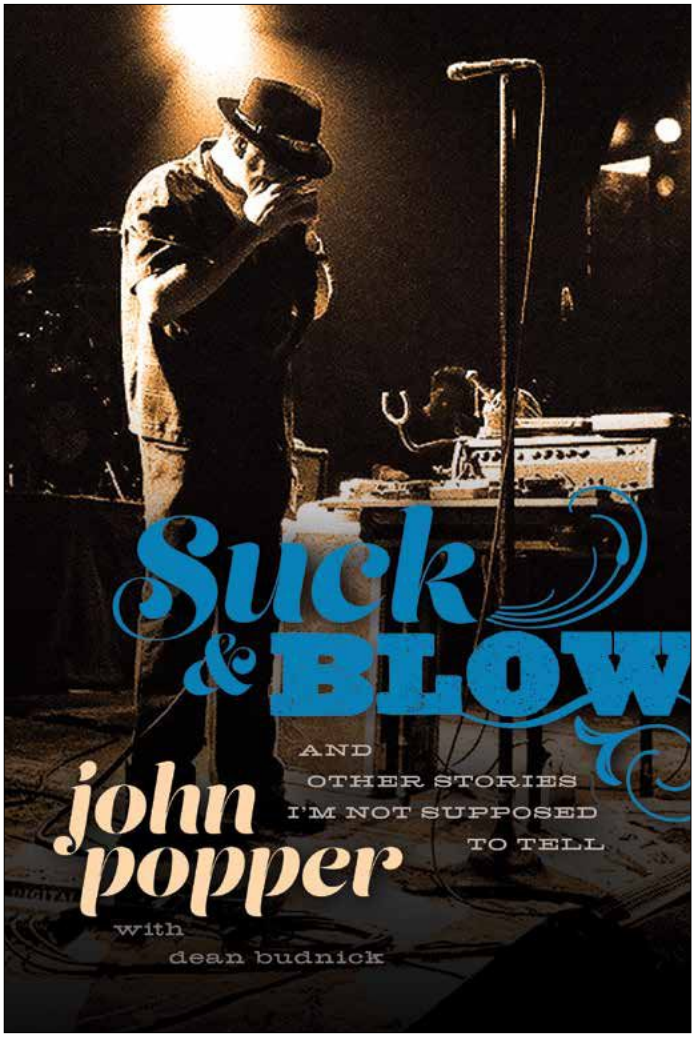
In 1995, Phish had *their* first shot at the Garden on New Year's. Our show that night was at Roseland Ballroom, which was about 20 blocks away, so before we went on, I decided to go down there and check it out. I can remember they were in the middle of some jam and Page McConnell was looking up into the endless ceiling that is Madison Square Garden. I desperately wanted to get into the damn room, but in just watching them play, any sense of competition kind of left me.

We finally had our chance, one year later, on December 31, 1996.

There was some added stress, though, because they kept telling us right up until the show that we'd only sold 6,000 tickets. We were having some shitty gigs around then too, so we thought we were heading into doom. But it turned out that when they were doing their calculations, they had somehow forgotten about all these other tickets, and we walked into a sell-out.

Our heads didn't get too big, though. There was this kindly looking, old elevator operator in the uniform of a doorman with the epaulets and the bright orange hat. I could tell he'd been there since the '30s or '40s, maybe even the '20s, because he looked like he was 90 years old. He'd clearly shrunken with age, and it looked like this had been his entire life's work. I could picture him as a teenager helping Louis Armstrong onto an elevator. *Man*, I thought, *he must have seen it all*. So I said to him, "You look like you've been here forever. I bet you've seen Sinatra, the Ali-Frazier fight, The Rolling Stones how many times. What's your favorite act you've seen?" And he looked up at me with those cute little eyes and said, "Get the fuck on the elevator." And that was Madison Square Garden.

A day earlier, while we were rehearsing for our big masterpiece, 10-years-in-the-making Madison Square Garden show, we met a guy at the rehearsal studio who had this human fly musical suit made of synthesizer parts. If you touched one part, it would say, "Blues, blues, blues," and another would say, "Traveler, traveler." None of us really thought much of this guy, but Bobby was such a sweetheart and so enamored of the technology that he had this guy open for us at Madison Square Garden. He asked him on all of our behalf, and then Bobby looked at us with such childlike eyes that we couldn't say no. The guy promised it would be a five-minute introduction, but on the night of the show, he wound up doing a 45-minute set. We could hear the roar we'd been waiting 10 years for, and then everyone slowly became bored and started mumbling amongst themselves. So I turned to Bobby: "You gave



away our 10-years-in-the-making standing ovation at Madison Square Garden."

I want to say it was one of those days, but you only have *one* of those days.

My other memory of that night was the death of the black cat.

This was our New Year's Eve ritual, which began in 1990. It largely had to do with Dave Graham and was sort of a tribute to his father, Bill Graham, who would dress as Father Time for the Grateful Dead every year. One night, while Dave and I were inebriated and I realized there were nine years left before the next century, we hit upon the idea that one of the black cat's lives would be sacrificed each year, with Dave onstage in costume dressed as the black cat.

The first year at Roseland Ballroom, he came out as a black cat, and all we could afford to do was throw him offstage. The next year, in New York City at The Paramount, we had a little more budget, and I mean a *little* more, so curiosity killed the cat. There was a question mark on a garbage can, and when he opened it up, it exploded and he died. Then, in 1992, I'd just had my accident, so we put the cat on a motorcycle and he crashed into some barrels.

By 1996, we had finally made it to Madison Square Garden, so our lighting guy, Paul Morrill, convinced us to let him do something special. Back when we had a band van and a crew van, he constantly asked whether he could ride with us because he thought he was an artist. He would also try to hit us up for a lighting fee *and* a designer fee during an era when we barely had any money to pay the crew, so of course, we put him in the crew van—it was great.

> "When the moment arrived and the black cat climbed up to fight these imaginary airplanes, his gorilla chest and six-pack fell off, so it looked like he'd been vivisected."
> JOHN POPPER

What Paul pitched us was this: Since we were finally at Madison Square Garden, what better thing than King Kong? The cat would be dressed in a gorilla suit and would climb the Empire State Building far over the skyline of Manhattan, where cartoon planes (as promised by Paul) would fly out of the sky through some holographic projection, swoop around and buzz him like flies, causing him to fall off at precisely the stroke of midnight.

By the way, none of our strokes of midnight were ever on time. There was never an exact counter, although, to her credit, [our longtime band employee] Gina really tried her best without access to a Navy clock. So, in the era before iPhones, if you came to one of our New Year's Eve shows, you were at the mercy of the house. That was keeping in the tradition of, "Leave the time to us when you enter these hallowed halls." The New Year's countdown could take place at 11:58 or, far more likely, at 12:03, but what was really important was that you came in on December 31 of one year and you left on January 1 of the next year. Who really cares when it's midnight? We're focusing on a point together, drinking champagne and hugging.

Really, that's how a New Year's party goes, unless you're lucky enough to have the TV on where they show the ball dropping. A timely ball dropping is always good, but sooner or later, all balls will drop, and remember, where the ball lands is where you want to keep your hands.

Another problem we had with the New Year's Eves was keeping track of the black cat's lives. The first few years we started counting down, but somewhere in the middle, Gina started counting up. We knew that the whole thing would end at 1999, but there was some confusion about what to put on the shirts. What does number six mean? The sixth time we're doing it or that there are six lives left? I don't think anybody else noticed, but one year, I lost it: "Oh, my God, the whole thing's ruined! Now nobody knows how many we've done and how many are left." That was as annoying as it gets.

But, back to Paul Morrill's New Year's Eve spectacular. The day of the show arrived, instead of a backdrop of Manhattan all he could get was a backdrop of Pittsburgh, which was troubling. Also, his Empire State Building looked exactly like the Williamsburgh Bank Tower in Brooklyn. Then, instead of an actual gorilla suit, he had a gorilla chest and six-

pack, which he would duct tape to Dave's belly. The airplanes, which he touted as cartoon projections independently flying through the air, were just light gels that would spin around where the lights were hung, so in no way would they be bothering the cat. You would just hear airplane noises.

When the moment arrived and the black cat climbed up to fight these imaginary airplanes, his gorilla chest and six-pack fell off, so it looked like he'd been vivisected. And then, when he fell, no one lowered him. He just hung there, like in a bad school play. So, being the improviser he is, Dave Graham just died right there, hanging.

So, the grand effect at midnight on New Year's Eve with Blues Traveler at Madison Square Garden in 1996 was that the King Kong cat climbed up the Williamsburgh Bank Tower in downtown Pittsburgh, had a hallucination, vivisected himself and died a mysterious midair lynching.

It cost us $40 grand, and, oddly enough, I believe that was the last year Paul Morrill worked for us.

Another thing we learned was that all the production costs were part of an exquisitely perfected art form in how to bleed you. The unions, for instance, were required to be there for anything that had to do with shipping and transportation, and they earned three times their normal rate if you went into overtime on New Year's. So we ended up doing four times the work and earned a little less than what we'd normally make.

But, in spite of all that, we wanted back in.

However, you needed to reserve Madison Square Garden more than a year ahead of time. In the summer of 1997, it turned out that Phish was already sitting on MSG for December 31, 1998. They had what's known as "first hold," and we had decided to challenge them for it, in which case, we put up half the money—it was over a half-million bucks—and they had 48 hours to respond, when they had to put all their money down. Finding a time when they were without resources or the ability to respond in that 48 hours would require chicanery.

We picked a time when we strategically found out they were in Scotland. This was in the '90s, so there weren't really good phones in Scotland, especially at 2 a.m., which we decided was the perfect time to start the clock ticking. The only person representing Phish in America was their accountant, and he was the guy we had to stop, so I sent a stripper every 15 minutes for eight hours to his office to read from Sammy Davis Jr.'s *Yes I Can*. His office was destroyed because, every 15 minutes, someone would show up, take her clothes off and start reading this bizarre book, and he wanted to know who was sending these strippers. It never occurred to him that it would be us; every stripper took a stripper's oath (I wasn't aware of one, but I was grateful) not to divulge who had sent her on this errand of evil.

But to his credit, Phish's manager, John Paluska, using a borrowed telephone and wire transfers, made it in the last two hours. We held him off for 46 hours, but with two hours to go, he transferred nearly $600,000 to Madison Square Garden, and I had to just give him a salute. I gave him everything I had, and he survived it. I don't even know if he knows this, but I'm ready to share that info now.

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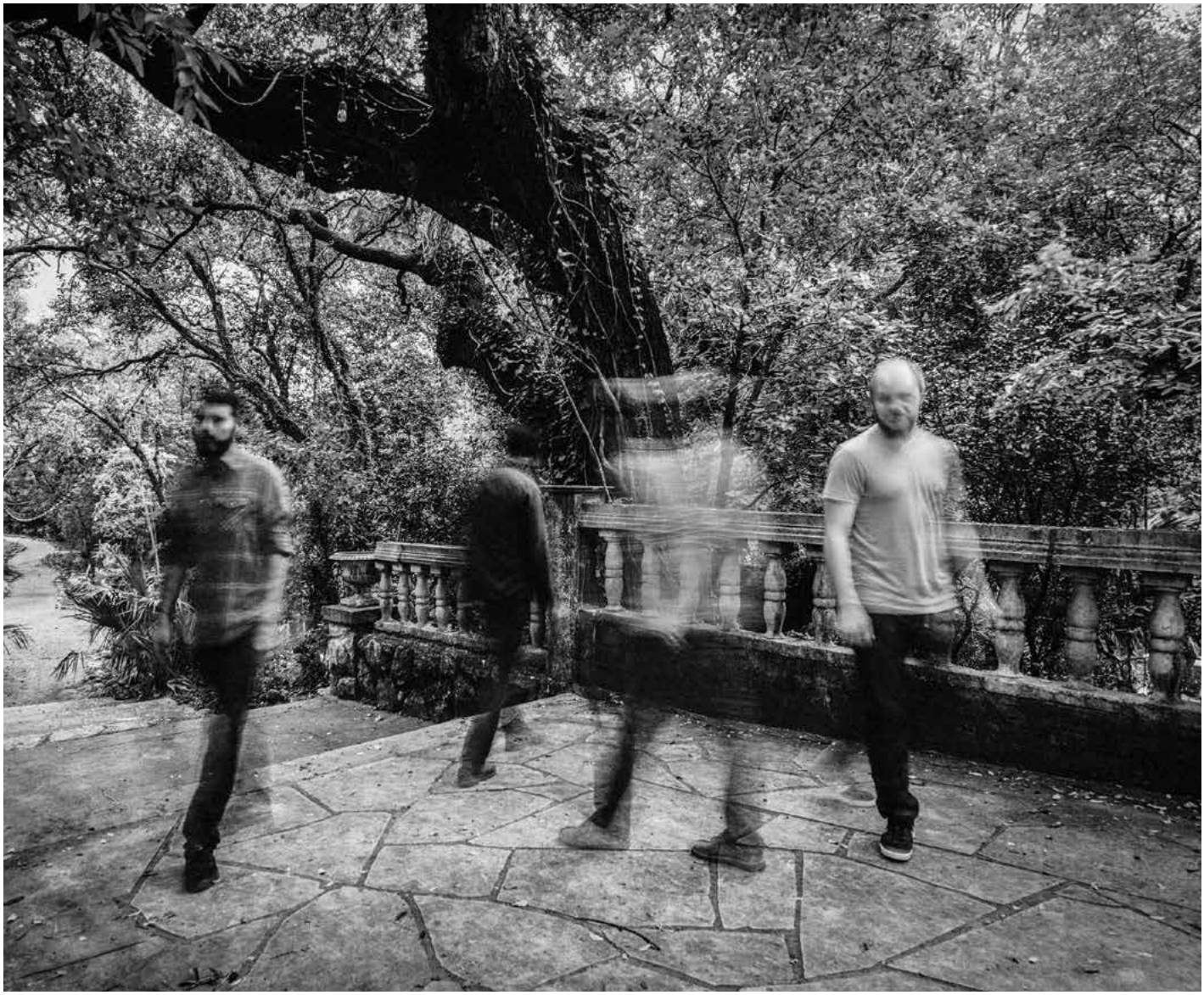

Explosions in the Wilderness

Austin, Texas' foremost ambassadors of instrumental rock turn in a space odyssey that's more terse and compact than grandiose, but still very Explosions in the Sky.

BY EMILY ZEMLER

Change may not be an inevitability, but it can be a necessity. It erases the complacency that can build over time, undoes the instinct to continue with something down a path simply because it is familiar, and alters the possible future narrative. Three years ago, as Explosions in the Sky began writing their seventh studio album, *The Wilderness*, the four musicians determined that change should be invited into their process.

"We have written songs the same way for 15 years," Explosions guitarist and bassist Michael James admits. "We've been a band for so long, and the way we've approached songwriting as a band was very much like, 'Each song needs to be its own story, its own three-act narrative, in a way.' It seemed like we'd done that for so long and there are so many different ways to write songs, and we were interested in exploring the ways."

"We always think, each time we make a record, [that] it's way different than anything we've done in the past," adds drummer Chris Hrasky. "And then people say, 'Yeah, sounds like you guys.' And we're like, 'Goddamnit!' And then, a year later, we do it again. It's cool, but then maybe we've beaten this dead horse a little too much. So that was the idea: We

"It all started with us watching the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey *way too many times," Michael James notes of their new "wilderness" process. "That's been one of our favorite movies forever.*

wanted to erase as many of our default settings as possible but still make songs that we like."

When Explosions in the Sky formed in Austin in 1999, the intention was to create instrumental rock music that was engaging and that revealed self-contained stories in each track (which have often been reflected by the group's poetic song titles). Their 2000 debut, *How Strange, Innocence*, set the stage for the career to come, and featured extended soundscapes, none of which were shorter than five minutes. For the band, composed of Hrasky, James and guitarists Munaf Rayani and Mark Smith, the music was a way of exploring emotion without words, of explaining a sensibility using only a combination of instrumental sounds. Since then, Explosions' career has been founded on those ideas, and by the time they released their last album, 2011's *Take Care, Take Care, Take Care* the band had developed a sizable enough fanbase to land at No. 16 on the Billboard Top 200.

But in 2012, as the musicians wrapped two film soundtracks (for *Prince Avalanche* and *Lone Survivor*) and began to slowly discuss how to proceed with their next album, there was an overwhelming sense that something needed to shift. "The grand idea was, more than ever, to not rewrite any song," Rayani explains. "Not note for note—we wouldn't do that—but not rewrite any song, in terms of tone, the way we have before. The idea was to really expand our way of thinking [and] maybe take some left turns when we were known to take a right turn. So I feel it's more of a real evolution. All of a sudden, we sprouted a new arm."

> "At first, we didn't know what we wanted the record to sound like, and we didn't all agree on what being experimental in this kind of writing process was going to entail. We're all extremely good friends and extremely good collaborators—and have been for a very long time—but we all have our own very strong opinions."
>
> MICHAEL JAMES

"We've written a lot of music, and it just became really obvious that if we were going to continue to write music in the same way, with the same artistic goals, we were going to lose interest," James adds. "We didn't want to lose interest. We didn't want to be bored by this."

***THE WILDERNESS*, WHICH DIDN'T FIND** its title until far later in the process, began as a pile of ideas, all partially formed and uncertain. There were a lot of arguments and conversations as the musicians sorted through that pile. It was a challenge to let go of old habits and allow new methods to sift in. Breaking muscle memories, it turns out, is not the easiest of tasks.

"To break those habits is a bit difficult because you are who you are, no matter how hard you want to be someone else," Rayani says, noting that one simple way of shifting the process is playing a part on a different instrument than one would typically select. "It feels forced in some moments. Whenever that would show up, where we would purposefully try not to be who we are, then that would draw some pause. But in other moments, when the idea was just to be

Continued on Page 79

Four of a kind: Taylor Burns, Joel King, Ricky Young, Ben Dumas (l-r)

Déjà Vu All Over Again

The Wild Feathers are happy to bask in the acoustic bliss and CSNY-hydra of the classic-rock era—just don't call them an Americana act. **BY JIM FARBER**

THERE'S BARELY ENOUGH room for four guys to stand abreast onstage at The Box, an ornate, high-priced burlesque club and performance space located in the heart of New York's Lower East Side. As the front-line members of The Wild Feathers thrash and wail on the venue's petite proscenium, their shoulders nearly meet, forcing them to sway their instruments to and fro to negotiate the space. As awkward as the setup may be, it only seems to energize the players, who are treating the industry-friendly crowd to hors d'oeuvre-sized portions of their meaty new album, *Lonely Is a Lifetime*.

Not only does the intimacy of the venue concentrate the sound, but it also offers a perfect metaphor for a band in rare sync. The Nashville-based Wild Feathers have built an esteemed reputation, in part, through their ability to squeeze fresh feeling out of American rock clichés, updating the values of bands like Buffalo Springfield and Tom Petty's Heartbreakers. At the same time, the Feathers hold the notion of collaborative songwriting as a sacred oath, honoring equanimity in a way that, in today's ego-mad pop world, seems practically communist.

The Wild Feathers boast three formidable songwriters and four singers, in the tradition of great '60s and '70s hydra-headed acts like Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young and Fleetwood Mac. While each Feathers vocalist and writer remains distinct in timbre and sensibility, they meld with surprising consistency. There's no frontman here—just *frontmen*, creating an unbreakable showing of brotherly force.

The day after their showcase, the band's core trio have congregated in the conference room of their record company, Warner Bros., bantering as fluidly as they write and play. To 31-year-old guitarist Ricky Young, the lure of their approach comes down to simple math. "If two heads are better than one, then three or four must be even better," he says. "It increases your chances of coming up with something great."

"WHEN I'M WRITING, I ACTUALLY WAIT ON A lot of songs," adds bassist Joel King, who is a year younger. "I could finish it, but then it won't be as much a Wild Feathers song. If I take a song to the other guys, they'll unlock something in it, and it becomes something more than I could do on my own."

For the title track of the new album, the band's second, their collective spirit reached an almost supernatural high. They wrote the track "Lonely Is a Lifetime" several years ago, during a stay at the historic Joshua Tree Inn, the hotel where Gram Parsons fatally overdosed. "Gram Parsons' birthday was coming up and we said, 'What if we stay in the room he died in?'" Young recounts.

"We figured there would be a thousand 'Grampires' trying to stay there," reasons 31-year-old guitarist Taylor Burns, referring to those ghouls who savor Parson's morbid, and mythic, end. (In 1973, Parson's manager stole the star's body during its transport to a funeral home and cremated him in Joshua Tree National Park).

As it turned out, the "death room"—No. 8—was vacant. "We checked in and went out to the local bars, got drunk and had a blast," Young says. "Somehow, we made it back to the hotel. In the room, we picked up a guitar and wrote the song in 39 minutes." Even the band's sleeping arrangements that night speak to their closeness. "The room had only one bed," King says. "At least it was a king," quips Young.

> "When you're on the road that much, you feel like cowboys on the trail. You meet cool people, but you don't have time to get deep. The only real interaction you have is with each other."
>
> **TAYLOR BURNS**

THE ESSENTIAL IDEA FOR A BAND OF EQUALS evolved early in The Wild Feathers' formation. Nashville songwriter Young bounced his idea for a multi-pronged act off fellow Music City native King. At the time, each player had his own unsuccessful band, so King was open to Young's notion. Still, things didn't truly coalesce until a trip down to Austin, where the pair met Burns, who was performing in a band with guitarist Preston Wimberly. "It was the perfect storm," Young says. Burns and Wimberly relocated to Nashville, where the four hired drummer Ben Dumas, cementing the initial fivesome. (Wimberly has since parted ways with the group.) Each of the main creative voices has their own strengths in terms of genre. "I come from more of a folk background," Young says. "Taylor has a more blues background and Joel is full-blown rock-and-roll. Together, it's a good recipe."

Still, there were kinks to smooth out, especially with the vocals. "I never sang harmony before, so it was super difficult for me," says Burns. "I kept going up to the melody. Also, I was used to being the frontman. It took adjustments on all of our parts. We had to swallow some pride."

While none of the guys' individual bands had broken through, they each enjoyed solid underground reputations. An A&R man at Interscope Records, Jeff Sosnow, had followed the individual work of Young and King. After befriending them and hearing the new lineup in 2010, he signed the Feathers before they played a single live show or recorded a song. The label made for an odd fit. While Interscope has had great success with hip-hop, R&B and pop, rock music is far from its specialty. "It was horrible," says Burns. "No one there got us. They didn't listen to the kind of music we did or have the same reference points."

It didn't come as a shock, then, when halfway through recording their debut album, the label dumped them. "It was hard to see at the time," Burns says. "But it was a blessing in disguise."

That's because Sosnow ended up leaving the company and landing at Warner Bros., a label with a long legacy of breaking rock acts that recently shepherded the careers of current stars like Gary Clark Jr., Disturbed and Muse. In 2013, the band released their self-titled debut, shaped by producer Jay Joyce, known for his work with rock artists from The Wallflowers to Cage The Elephant. The Wild Feathers were self-conscious in the studio while signed to Interscope, building songs track by track. Joyce wanted them to work more organically, stressing a live approach.

Though the songs they had were mainly written on acoustic guitars, the band became more forceful in the studio. The result inserted a backbone into the dusty and rustic sound of Americana. "I listen to a lot of music that has become known as Americana, like Ryan Adams and Jason Isbell," Burns says. "But I think our music falls more into an 'American rock' category."

Continued on Page 78

Steve Kimock crafts a personal statement from his home state before relocating back to the Bay Area.

BY DEAN BUDNICK

Pennsylvania Dreaming

"MY INTERESTS OFF THE STAGE, IF I'M NOT UP THERE DOING lead guitar or the rock band thing, are more along the lines of playing with acoustic guitars and electronics," Steve Kimock explains. "When I'm at home, I'm always playing the acoustic, working on the fretless stuff and the slide stuff—specific intonations—and doing whatever sound design I can manage with whatever electronics are around."

This melding of acoustic and electronic sounds manifests itself on Kimock's new studio album, *Last Danger of Frost*. The results are a cohesive whole, best absorbed in one sitting without distraction, as the music reveals and rewards with each subsequent listening session. Some of the palette may be unfamiliar to those more accustomed to Kimock's electric expressions in Zero, KVHW, Steve Kimock Crazy Engine and his recent Friends project, which explored Jerry Garcia's R&B roots. However, the spirit and emotion he vests in this new material reflects his musical intention in any setting. One of Kimock's hallmarks is his ability to sound purposeful, yet simultaneously carefree. Such spirited precision is in abundance on this album, which he recorded in his Pennsylvania home studio before packing up his family and moving to the West Coast, echoing a journey he initially made in the 1970s, before he returned to the Keystone State in 2002.

Steve Kimock's artistry, and his impressive array of guitars, is newly devoted to his touring quartet, K I M O C K. While the project is of recent vintage, the guitarist shares longstanding relationships with a rhythm section comprised of bassist Bobby Vega (a Zero alum with whom Kimock has shared the stage for over three decades), and Steve's son, drummer John Morgan Kimock (a member of Mike Gordon's latest quintet). Leslie Mendelson, who recently entered Kimock's orbit, completes the four-piece on vocals and keys.

You recorded this album in your home studio in Pennsylvania before you moved with your family back to the West Coast. Did that imminent departure play a role in the creation and release of this music?

That might have been in there on some level, subconsciously. It felt like time for a move, maybe to do some new music or try some different things. I don't think it was featured in my head, but I bet it was in there. I was just finding my way around my room with the sounds that were available to me in the moment. It was an acknowledgement of this not-super-directed activity that occupies me when I'm not up there doing the rock band thing.

As soon as I started working on it and listening back to the results, it kind of took me right back to being a kid and not knowing anything about music specifically. When I was a kid, I'd go hide in the closet and put the speakers up against my head and listen to Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma*. I had that whole private world thing going on. This was kind of like that for me, that feeling of hearing something for the first time and just being in it and trying to make sense of it—the youthful, psychedelic wonder of it all.

The way the album unfolds reminds me of early Todd Rundgren records like *A Wizard, a True Star* or *Todd*. It's something that merits an immersive experience, as opposed to a casual listen.

I was a huge fan of that music. One time when I was just a kid, Todd, being kind of local, showed up at a place in Bethlehem [Pa.], while he was still in the Nazz. When we saw those guys getting out of whatever vehicle they were getting out of dressed like spacemen—that messed us all up. [*Laughter.*]

But, yes, that comparison makes sense to me—that's definitely how I felt about it myself. There are spots on the record where you kind of sit down and white-knuckle yourself into the chair with a

big, dopey grin on your face; There's a big component to this thing that's very naively psychedelic. I enjoyed that, it took me back and I had no idea that's where I'd be going in my head with it.

It was wintertime when I was doing it, during an East Coast snowfall. I remembered being young and seeing snow coming down through the streetlight outside and everything would get real quiet, and I'd think, "Oh, this is a good time to play, this is a good time to listen." There's something about that quiet time in the new snowfall that informed the thing. It took me back and being so close to where I grew up, with the snow and finding my way in the music. It all appears to have communicated. I didn't know that it would—it's a very personal little musical trip—but so far, it appears that what I was feeling is a lot of what people feel when they hear it, so that's good.

One of the hallmarks of your music is the ability to express emotion, particularly through your instrumental passages. Has that been a conscious goal or just a product of your efforts to express yourself?
That was always kind of in there. It's funny how trying to talk about this or understand it just takes me back to being young and in that environment.

When I started to play, I really enjoyed listening to music and I thought—and I still think—that "music" is the feeling that you get when you listen to good music. When I was a kid, I'd be playing and people would say, "You should learn theory." I kind of resisted that for a while but, eventually, I pursued it, knowing that on some level, there was an absolutist point of view to the thing where I'd say, "It's these notes." But while it might be a C minor chord, at the same time, I also knew there was a referential point of view, like a ship tossed on the stormy sea or something that was melancholy or triumphant—there'd be some associated feeling to the sounds.

I followed both of those paths for a long time without being able to reconcile them. Then about 20-25 years ago, I started to get specifically into microtonality and tuning temperament and stuff like that. When I got that part of the technical information about music, the circle kind of closed. There weren't two viewpoints anymore. You can follow either of those ideas and, eventually, it takes you to "music is proceeding; it's a succession of feeling states." You can take it from either direction and wind up in the same place—you harmony things together, and the longer you do it, the bigger that picture of harmony becomes. It's not just the notes and the chords and all the sounds—it's all the people in the room, it's whatever energy the gathering has that you're in. You do what you can to be sensitive to that and to do as little as you can to try and give it some balance.

That's the basic approach. I just try and check in every day with the sounds and see how I feel about them and try to use all the different resonances. Where am I hearing this today? Where am I hearing these harmonies? How does this make me feel? I have a bunch of little exercises that I do to put me in touch with that. For me, the music is functional when it's felt. Function is felt. So I do my best to stay on that. The emotional component of the thing is a built-in part, that's the idea. I specifically possess that in my daily musical life.

Although you described this album as a reflection of your non-directed activity, it's fair to say you have quite a work ethic. In a recent interview, you indicated that your last day off was in the 1970s.
I recall it very clearly, it was very powerful. I literally had nothing to do and nowhere to go. I just remember it being beautiful. Then you get busy and you eventually have to get to work. You're aware that there is stuff you need to do and your day becomes this whole process of getting from where you are now to where you're supposed to be. It kind of takes you out of the moment. What do I have to do now to be over *there*? And then when I get there, I've got to do *this*.

When I look back on your career, I think of someone who has pursued just about whatever he's wanted to do. If something has moved you, then you've pursued it, irrespective of traditional commercial prospects.
That's not too far off. I really enjoy music—it kind of bounces you around a little bit. There are definitely weeks where it's Freddie King week and then, there will be two weeks of traditional Irish music. Then, somehow, there will be six days of Chemical Brothers. I just bounce around between stuff. There's this giant list of things that keeps rotating. If you're looking for something interesting, the thing that just floated down to the bottom of the list now becomes a matter of interest because it's the least interesting thing. You pull that back to the top, and the thing you were most interested in drops to the bottom.

Can you talk about that relationship between acoustic guitar and electronic sounds?
In my head, the relationship between the acoustic stuff, and the electronic stuff is that those things were formative listening for me. There's a lot of folk music in my family. My aunt Dorothy Siftar was a folk singer, a real dyed-in-the-wool, 100-percent folk singer, who played with Pete Seeger. So I was growing up with that and, at the same time, growing up with the early synthesizer stuff that was featured in pop music with The Beach Boys and The Beatles. Hearing the electronic sounds that were starting to happen on the synthesizer—I loved *Switched-On Bach* when it came out. It was a great record—I loved those sounds. There's a purity to the analog synth thing and a purity to the acoustic thing that attracted me to it, and still does.

As time went on, I started appreciating the similarity between fingerpicking and sequencing. They're very different styles of music for most people, but I'm fine with them coexisting. There is some rhythmic reiteration of a sequence of pitches. Why shouldn't people morph in between those two things? One of my goals, moving forward, is to investigate the possibilities and turn those acoustic sounds into electric sounds and electric sounds into acoustic sounds.

> "There are definitely spots on the record where you kind of sit down and white knuckle yourself into the chair with a big dopey grin on your face, it's like that."
> STEVE KIMOCK

You're supporting the album with a number of live dates. When you recorded *Last Danger of Frost*, did you have the expectation that you'd translate this material to the live setting?
Did I think that I would go out and tour the album specifically? No, I didn't think that. I thought that I would just make it as sort of a keepsake, a statement for myself for personal reasons. I pushed in those directions because I'm attracted to them but I hadn't initially conceived it in terms of: "I'm writing for a tour." That never entered my mind, although I think the concepts involved are workable onstage.

A lot of it is made doable by my son John, on the drums, who is just a super musical cat and somebody who really understands the electronic portion of things. The technical folks that we have were able to get all kinds of sounds into the live performance and we're finding more ways to manipulate that stuff and use it as we go. We're incorporating the electronic aspect into the improvisational chemistry.

John's bio mentions that Todd Rundgren once destroyed his drums onstage at The Fillmore. How and when did that happen?
We were up there with Missing Man—me and Bobby Vega, Prairie Prince and Vince Welnick,

back in the day. Johnny was onstage. He was just a few years old, and he'd play along. He had these little bongos with the drum stick taped on there with a cymbal on top. Then Todd came out to do "Bang the Drum" and saw those little drums onstage and started running around the stage beating them. They were falling apart and he was breaking them. The audience was horrified—they didn't get that he didn't get that the drums weren't a prop or a toy. That was Johnny's trip.

Have you seen your son play with Mike Gordon's band and, if so, what was your takeaway?

That was an extreme proud papa moment for me. Last time Mike Gordon was in town was at The Fillmore, so I got to sit down and enjoy the gig. I thought it was fantastic and Johnny did a great job. He's got a lot of responsibility in that band and he nailed it. I'm slightly biased, but it was great just watching him.

He could always play. It's kind of unusual. He was like, "OK, I'm two. Where's my drum?" And he just started playing. The progression I've seen is in his professionalism and maturity as a writer, and the amount of focus that he has on realizing his music—it's pretty extraordinary. He's a powerful dude.

So he just gravitated toward the drums when he was a toddler?

He started when he could crawl, pulling the pots and pans out of the cupboard and beating on them with spoons. He figured out right away that he could hit stuff and did a good job at it. The part that got me to thinking that he was going in this compositional direction was he would make these little collections of stuff. He'd have a pot, a box and some toy or a cymbal, and lay them out on the floor around him and sit or kneel. I'd walk through the room and he'd say, "You want to hear a song?" Then he played this thing on this little collection, this little compositional array. I would do the obligatory daddy clap and go, "That's really good, man," and he would look at me and say, "You want to hear it again?" Then he played it again.

Like father, like son: John Morgan Kimock in action

He saw his material, saw what path he wanted to take and it was pretty neat. It was a very compositional approach at a very early age. He kept with that. The drumming, which is fantastic, is one thing, but watching his progression as a composer has been most satisfying for me.

John is in your current group, along with your longtime collaborator Bobby Vega. Leslie Mendelson completes the quartet. What drew you to her and how did you meet?

My interests from a very early age have been equal parts world music and electric blues and the quirky pop stuff. You can't be a fan of Rundgren's without being a fan of songcraft—the level of craft that goes into putting that stuff together. Leslie is one of those folks who is all about the songcraft. I like having that element in there. For me, it balances the improvisation, the blues aspect and world music aspect. It makes sense to me. It made sense to me when The Beatles did it. It makes sense to me now.

We bumped into each other at one of those TRI "Weir Here" things, the Bob Weir show. I don't remember what the tune was, but I said, "Let's play a song." She was on the piano and pulled out this nice R&B kind of thing, which I thought was hip. We enjoyed that and there were gigs almost immediately. I think I was at the Great American Musical Hall with Bernie Worrell, and everyone just came down. Weir came down and played his ass off, Leslie came down and sang her ass off, we did a bunch of stuff and it was just fun playing. There's enough overlap in our listening and musical interests, and enough stuff that diverges to make it interesting.

You recently performed with David Lindley, someone who doesn't receive the full accolades he deserves. How did that come about?

I've probably been digging his stuff without knowing it was him for a long time. Thirty years after [The Youngbloods'] "Darkness, Darkness" came out, which I thought was a cool tune, I realized it was him playing the fiddle on the beginning of it, which was so spooky. I think he got everyone's attention on Jackson Browne's "Running on Empty" with the steel guitar stuff that he was playing. It was extraordinary. Nobody knew what to make of that—"How the hell is he doing that? I wish I had thought of that"—it was so good.

He had his own band El Rayo-X. I used to go see them all the time, and seeing him in that band is what got me into trying to play the steel, trying to play the Hawaiian guitar, because he played great Hawaiian guitar and he still does. The way he handled that material was his own take on blending American music with ethnic music and the quirky pop thing with the world music—all that jazz. I love that. He's just a fantastic guitar player completely out of the mold of the standard guitar hero.

There had been a couple of times where people said to me, "Hey, do you want to do a gig with David Lindley?" and I'd be like, "I don't want to play with that guy." I love him, the last thing on earth I'd want to do is to defile that cat's raga. Then it came up again, and I was too busy to object or something, so we went ahead and did it.

We took the "rehearsal is for cowards" approach. It was just me and him. We collided onstage and it was really wonderful. I brought seven guitars. I didn't know what was going to work, but we listened to a couple of the instruments together and realized we had a good pairing between my fretless resonator guitar and his microtonally fretted bouzouki. So we stuck there for a couple of tunes and I played some lap steel, which he got a huge kick out of because I was doing sort of a Freddie Roulette-style routine and Freddie was the guy who got Dave into guitar. He didn't know I was doing that kind of slant-bar stuff. We had a ton of fun and it was really wonderful. I'm glad we finally got a chance to do that.

Circling back to the initial question, what led you to return to Northern California?

I never intended to stay on the East Coast anywhere near as long as I had. I was thinking I was moving back to try it out for a couple of years. We were there for the longest time, raising beautiful children and enjoying our garden, enjoying being on a dead-end street in a town with 500 people in it—super-low drama, just chilling with the kids. But the winters grew increasingly harsh. I was feeling increasingly isolated. I did not have the creative commons that I had in California. And even though the schools there were very good, I thought, "Let's get into the middle-school thing somewhere else. We'll get out of these winters and try that for a little bit." So for the kids, for the school, for the weather, and to have more connections with musical and technical stuff, we decided to make the move. We'll stick it out here for a little while and then who knows, maybe Switzerland?

Stuart Levine

INDIE IS DEAD

With the help of some undercover Deadheads, The National reclaim a classic American songbook for the 21st century—and emerge as heirs to the Grateful Dead's glimmering world.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

IT'S AN AUGUST afternoon, deep into the summer of the Grateful Dead, and Aaron Dessner is putting the final touches on his magnum opus. For the past four years, he's moved steadily down the Steal Your Face rabbit hole as he's recorded *Day of the Dead*—a massive, 59-track, multi-band audio re-creation of the Dead's songbook that will one day also serve as a *Nuggets*-like Rosetta Stone for early 21st-century independent rock.

Just over a month ago, the Dead's "core four" members—guitarist Bob Weir, bassist Phil

Playing in the Band: Sam Cohen, Aaron Dessner, Conrad Doucette, Bryan Devendorf, Scott Devendorf, Walter Martin and Josh Kaufman (l-r) back Bob Weir at TRI Studios on March 24, 2012.

Jay Blakesberg

Lesh, and drummers Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart—played their last "Fare Thee Well" shows at Chicago's Soldier Field, and Deadhead fever is at a temperature it hasn't reached since Jerry Garcia passed away in 1995. A sitting president went so far as to describe the Dead as a distinctly "American band" in the event's program, Chicago transformed from "The Jewel of the Midwest" into a city-sized Shakedown Street and Dead tributes have popped up everywhere from museums to traditional houses of worship. Bill Murray, Chloë Sevigny, Katy Perry, Sen. Al Franken, George R.R. Martin, Woody Harrelson, Lars Ulrich and Jim Irsay—not to mention enough musicians to field an indie versus jam flag football game—made the pilgrimage for what was billed as the final grouping of the band's surviving classic members. While it is only somewhat accurate to say that it's never been a better time to be a Deadhead, it's definitely never been a better time to come out as a closet Deadhead and wax poetic on the band's cultural/personal impact, both onstage and in the media.

On this idyllic afternoon, Aaron's relaxing with his family on a lakeside hammock outside of their quaint home just north of Hudson, N.Y.—a small, beautiful city on the western border of Columbia County. In recent years, Hudson and the surrounding Upper Hudson Valley have grown into Woodstock-like garden retreats for retired artistic types, expat Brooklynites and others looking to escape the hustle of modern, *#Girls* New York and the bustle of its current brunch culture. In other words, it's a great place to prove a theory that all great crate diggers have the potential to grow into expert antiquers or, as Aaron describes, "a little hotbed of important and interesting people." His young daughter's school was even founded by two people who met at a New Year's Eve Dead concert in the late '70s.

Aaron has gradually spent more time away from Brooklyn, whose sound and artistic landscape he's helped map for the past 17 years. However, he's still close enough to be in earshot of the city's current happenings and, as he astutely points out, can drive to JFK Airport in less time than it takes to listen to *Day of the Dead* in its entirety.

He's also in the process of building a recording space in an old barn and has carved out a second career as an in-demand producer and studio hand for acts like The Lone Bellow, Local Natives and Mumford & Sons, who wrote a portion of their latest record at his Brooklyn home studio and were so moved by their surroundings that they named a song after his neighborhood.

On this sunny afternoon, Bryce—his twin brother, fellow guitarist in indie-rock survivors

The National and closest artistic partner—is visiting from his summer home in the Catskills. Wearing cut-off jeans and casual short-sleeved shirts, and with their unkempt-hair inching toward their facial scruff, the Dessners look like distant relatives of the often besuited members of The National—the art-rock collective that, culturally and chronologically, connected The Strokes' gritty, downtown garage-rock to Vampire Weekend's Washington Heights, Ivy League indie-Afro-pop, and slow-burned from blogger underdogs opening for Clap Your Hands Say Yeah to one of the most far-reaching New York indie bands of their generation.

Like all great rock combos, each member of the quintet has been assigned a carefully defined, if not entirely all-encompassing, persona: Matt Berninger, The National's baritone-voiced frontman capable of singing both grand, acceptance-of-age lullabies and screaming angsty rock anthems; Aaron, the group's in-house producer and chief instrumental songwriter; Bryce, their classical enthusiast and composer-in-residence; Scott Devendorf, the band's genial skate-punk-hippie bassist; and his younger brother Bryan, the new-wave-influenced drummer who was described in The National film *Mistaken For Strangers* as the rock-and-roll counterpoint to the rest of the band's coffee shop ethos.

Though few onlookers would have pointed to the Dead as an obvious influence when they first formed, over the past eight years and especially as they geared up for the release of *Day of the Dead,* The National have emerged as both unassuming heirs to the Dead's storied songbook and harbingers of interfaith indie-jam cool.

"*Deadicated* was well meaning, but I'm not sure how many people really got deeply into that," Aaron says of the early '90s Dead tribute benchmark that drew in unexpected fans like Jane's Addiction, Elvis Costello,

> "We're shining a light on their songs and songwriting and then, the avant-garde aspects of the Dead."
>
> AARON DESSNER

Suzanne Vega, Dwight Yoakam and Lyle Lovett. "We're shining a light on their songs and songwriting, and then, the avant-garde aspects of the Dead. 'Inventive reinterpretation' is a definite theme, but there is a real mixture of sounds, just like the Dead had different periods—some more radically different than others. It doesn't really matter if the songs were recorded at the same studio or with the same group of people—there's a thread that ties it all together."

His brother chimes in instinctively, elaborating on Aaron's thoughts and demonstrating the sibling telepathy that makes The National's swells of sound feel so seamless. "There are all these entryways—very well-known artists that are really accessible, music for really serious listeners, which is probably what we're most proud of, and some crazy avant-garde outliers that really excite me, but maybe not other people. There've been lots of heated discussions about the sequencing."

Bryce is also bouncing between myriad projects, including a curatorial commitment in Europe, film scores and a ballet that challenges all conceptions of how the word "heady" should be used in an article on the Dead. *Day of the Dead* stems from Aaron's longstanding relationship with Red Hot, the not-for-profit dedicated to fighting AIDS through pop culture and eye-opening all-star albums. Yet, like most of the Dessners' projects, they are *both* deeply involved. It's their most ambitious endeavor since "Dark Was the Night," a Red Hot compilation and subsequent concert that featured contributions from David Byrne, St. Vincent, Bon Iver, Yeasayer, Sharon Jones and many others. If it's not their *Chinese Democracy*, then *Day of the Dead* is definitely the final piece of the Berlin Wall to fall between the great divide that once separated indie from jam.

THERE'S AT LEAST A FESTIVAL'S worth of small victories planted throughout the album—which will be available as an expansive vinyl box set when it's released in late May—whether it's an official version of The War on Drugs' "Touch of Grey" cover, Jim James' destined reading of "Candyman," a Kevin Bacon-like meeting of Kurt Vile and J Mascis on "Box of Rain" or the inevitable pairing of Justin Vernon with his sweet-voiced, cosmic godfather Bruce Hornsby on "Black Muddy River." Charles Bradley turns in an Apollo-worthy "Cumberland Blues," while Courtney Barnett adds some Pavement-like slacker-swagger to the Altamont response "New Speedway Boogie." Arcade Fire multi-instrumentalist and folk enthusiast Richard Reed Parry rubs elbows with The Band's Garth Hudson, Caroline Shaw and Little Scream on "Broke-down Palace;" Jenny Lewis offers both a sweet reading of "Cassidy" with Moses Sumney and a sultry take on "Sugaree" with Phosphorescent; and Weir shows up on the album's two live tracks, Wilco's 2013 version of "St. Stephen" and the album-closing "I Know You Rider" with The National.

THUNDER (VOL.1)

01. Touch of Grey - The War on Drugs
02. Sugaree - Phosphorescent, Jenny Lewis & Friends
03. Candyman - Jim James & Friends
04. Cassidy - Moses Sumney, Jenny Lewis & Friends
05. Black Muddy River - Bruce Hornsby and DeYarmond Edison
06. Loser - Ed Droste, Binki Shapiro & Friends
07. Peggy-O - The National
08. Box of Rain - Kurt Vile and the Violators (featuring J Mascis)
09. Rubin and Cherise - Bonnie 'Prince' Billy & Friends
10. To Lay Me Down - Perfume Genius, Sharon Van Etten & Friends
11. New Speedway Boogie - Courtney Barnett
12. Friend of the Devil - Mumford & Sons
13. Uncle John's Band - Lucius
14. Me and My Uncle - The Lone Bellow & Friends
15. Mountains of the Moon - Lee Ranaldo, Lisa Hannigan & Friends
16. Black Peter - Anohni and yMusic
17. Garcia Counterpoint - Bryce Dessner
18. Terrapin Station (Suite) - Daniel Rossen, Christopher Bear and The National (Featuring Josh Kaufman, Conrad Doucette, So Percussion and Brooklyn Youth Chorus)
19. Attics of My Life - Angel Olsen
20. St. Stephen (live) - Wilco with Bob Weir

"Wilco is in the bag that the Dead were—as much as I don't get from their records, I get from their live performances," Weir says. "I'd always heard: 'You've got to hear this band Wilco. They kind of remind me of you guys.' When I finally heard them live, I was blinded. They play off of each other and they get the songs. When they're playing, everybody in their band knows every word of that story. You can hear everybody watching the movie in their music."

In what could surely play out like a *Pretty Woman* situation for hippies scorned by pasty-skinned record store clerks in the '90s, a holy trinity of Matador acts lend their support to some of the album's most psychedelic nuggets. Sonic Youth's chief jamband ambassador Lee Ranaldo revisits "Mountains of the Moon" with Lisa Hannigan and other friends, Ira Kaplan brings Yo La Tengo's hushed beauty to "Wharf Rat" and, speaking of Pavement, Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks offer a full-on segue between foster siblings "China Cat Sunflower" and "I Know You Rider."

Aaron divided the album into three sections in line with the Dead's motifs: "Thunder," "Lightning" and "Sunshine." The entire collection flows like

In a piece of National folklore, Bryan and Scott actually "borrowed" the Dessners' car to take Matt to an outdoor Phish show in the '90s, and the singer was so miserable that he spent the entire weekend in the car. Matt says he was turned off by the scene; not the music. Pretty much everyone else agrees that he didn't change his tune until after he played with Weir and Anastasio years later.

Stuart Levine

an extended Dead show that moves from first-set songs, like the above-mentioned "Touch of Grey" and "Candyman," to a mammoth, 16-minute "Terrapin Station," crafted with the help of a few members of Grizzly Bear; "drums" and "space" segments courtesy of So Percussion, Man Forever and Oneida; and Sam Amidon & Friends' Seeger-inspired version of the traditional goodbye hymn "And We Bid You Goodnight." Cass McCombs and his collaborators, including Furthur drummer and post-jam pioneer Joe Russo, lay down a crazy "Dark Star" that morphs into a second, experimental track labeled after a lyric as "Nightfall of Diamonds." For his contribution, McCombs says he set up a show "for the purpose of just doing one song—'Dark Star'—and, when we got into the studio, cut in and out of the shit we did onstage, *Anthem of the Sun* style." The Flaming Lips also offer a second, twisted reading of "Dark Side," one of the Dead's signature songs, while Real Estate finds a Byrds-like breeze on "Here Comes Sunshine," recorded with Woods' Jarvis Taveniere. Closing another circle, Mumford & Sons' rocking version of "Friend of the Devil" feels stylistically akin to their surprisingly plugged-in latest record, which was partially inspired by their time with Aaron.

In order to tie *Day of the Dead*'s various threads together, the Dessners also assembled a house band featuring Aaron, the Devendorfs, The Walkmen's Walter Martin, former Yellowbirds members Josh Kaufman and Sam Cohen, and Takka Takka drummer Conrad Doucette to back many of their guests and allow for full-blown improvisation. Bryce participated in some of the sessions and wrote a new piece of orchestral music as a prelude to "Terrapin Station," which includes a few Easter eggs itself. "There's an 'Other One' quote in there since we didn't record a version for the record," he says.

Scott likens the house band's sessions to the loose feel of *The Basement Tapes*. "It was interesting and educational to record with that intention," he says over a beer at Threes Brewing, a Brooklyn bar and venue where he hosts a monthly Grateful Dead DJ set that, on this evening, kicks in with some primal, blues-boogie Pigpen chestnuts. Perhaps The National's most approachable member as well as the band's resident cross-genre record collector, Scott's a true Dead freak, who occasionally wears bootleg Stealie T-shirts onstage and even had the LivePhish app on his phone for a while. "We didn't always know who was going to sing and, sometimes, ideas came out of nowhere—*bang, bang, bang*. Other times, we channeled a National vibe. "

"This project has been like coming home to all this music that we listened to when we were at camp," Aaron says. "When we were sitting out in the woods and getting good at guitar, 80 percent of what we played was the Grateful Dead. What's especially interesting about this record is that there aren't just some of the great voices of our generation, but also the generation above us and just below us. It is just really fun to hear their passion, hear them celebrate the music and shine a very positive light on the songwriting—the soul of it. The Dead are now just part of the canon of American music."

DAY OF THE DEAD'S ROOTS

stretch back even further than The National itself to Cincinnati, where all five members of the group grew up before coalescing around New York in the late '90s. As young musicians in their early teens, the Dessners learned to play their instruments to the Dead's music.

"Grateful Dead songs and, then, post-punk songs—that's all we knew how to do," Bryce admits, noting that the Dead's music was also there, under the surface, influencing the architects of modern indie music. "If you look at people who are the generation older than us, like Ira and Lee, or even lyricists and singers like Will Oldham or Bill Callahan, you can hear the Dead in their phrasing—that was their portal into music."

The twins were exposed to the Dead through family friends—who served as a direct bridge to the tail end of the original hippie movement—and their buddy Alex and his brothers who, Aaron says, "were deeply into the Grateful Dead—the first time we played in public was on their deck." Like many aspiring guitarists, the Dessners practiced to bootlegs that were passed down to them, and that music served as their compass to various regions of American music. Bryce points out that Jerry Garcia played guitar like a fiddle and that once he realized he could never truly master Garcia's technique, he decided to pursue his own path, "veering off into classical." Aaron, who was studying upright bass at the time and would later supply the low-end to some of The National's own recordings, saw a connection to jazz, improvisation and, as Bryce puts it, the concept of the "multi-instrumentalist."

"We learned that element of virtuosity from the Dead," Bryce continues. "That voracious interest in music defined us."

The Devendorfs lived nearby and, before he could even drive, Bryan formed a band with the Dessners, sowing the seeds for what would eventually blossom into The National. "The first time we got together to practice, they came to my house, and we did this instrumental 'Eyes of the World' in my attic," Bryan

fondly reflects on his first jam session with the twins, noting that their early repertoire looked like a Deadhead mixtape. "All kids have their allegiances. You hang out with this group or that group—goth kids, suburban hippie kids, problem kids, straight fuck-ups who got into stupid shit. I was sort of clueless. It was mostly just a clique thing. There were no fights in the street."

"We were just down in our basement, so we were immune to what people think of as the clash between the punks and the hippies," Bryce adds. "I remember sitting on campus strumming some Dead and someone said, 'I would *hate* your band.' [*Laughter*.] That was the first time that it really occurred to me that people have different tastes." (Funny enough, years later, that same classmate ended up forming the Brassland label with the Dessners and releasing The National's first record.)

Long before the festival scene had its jamband resurgence in the post-Jerry '90s, or reached the mainstream after the "mega-fest" boom of the past decade, Aaron, Bryce and Bryan would play keg parties around suburban Ohio that captured the Age of Aquarius' fireflies and *Wonder Years* energy. One early performance—dubbed "Burt's Barn"—was even taped and passed around Maxell-style. "We tried to have our own little version of that energy," Aaron says, admitting that they were shy and used the jam sessions "partly as an excuse not to have to talk to people."

The Dessners describe themselves as sheltered teens from a close family and, though they never saw the Grateful Dead live, they attended concerts by many bands in their orbit, like Béla Fleck and David Grisman, and maintained a deep reverence for the Allman Brothers Band. While reminiscing about what Aaron calls an "insane, crazy" Phish gig at Bogart's, Bryce recalls the ringing in his virgin ears after the show. "Trey's one of the best guitarists that I've ever seen live, but the interest there was more in that weird energy and alchemy of the band, and less about the songs. With the Dead, it was like they were tapping into some *other*," the normally reserved Bryce gushes.

They continued to play music with Bryan through high school and college and, with a few exceptions, focused on original material and a few stray Dead covers. "Most kids learn tons of Zeppelin, but we were always writing our own music," Bryce says. This being the early 1990s, Aaron adds that Nirvana was also "their thing." Cincinnati has long fostered a vibrant record-store culture and alternative scene, with bands playing along the banks of the Ohio River, and through the Dessners' sister Jessica they were exposed to a range of noise and hardcore bands—Jessica's boyfriend played in local punk-rock heroes Lizard 99 and, after she left for college, he'd come over and teach the twins Minutemen and The Pharaohs songs. But the Dead's music remained special. "Fast-forward into college, Alex passed away and their music became that much more important," Aaron says. "It became the story of our musical upbringing. It was always through that lens."

Like the Dessners, Scott and Bryan bonded over the Dead's music as they learned their instruments. Scott, who also immersed himself in the alt-rock scene, began his deep dive "during the last peak period in '89-'90" and, before he saw the Dead live, actually went to check out a parking-lot scene outside an area show. He remained "on the bus" through Garcia's death and continued to check out their various offshoots as well as Phish. "It was interesting to see how it transitioned—a portion of the audience continued and there were new fans," he says with a palpable sense of music-dork curiosity. "Bryan did more, in terms of spending all summer on tour with Phish, but we'd go to New Year's shows together and others here or there." His supportive, but goth-loving, wife jokes that Scott's Deadhead obsession is "her curse." "As I've gotten older, the Dead's music has resonated more emotionally," he says with a sense of perspective that feels very in line with The National's music itself.

"Scott has an encyclopedic knowledge of the Dead and studies their music," Aaron chuckles. "One of our favorite ways to unwind after a big National show is to go backstage and quiz Scott about their eras."

Scott met Matt—a tall, lanky Smiths fan with a gift for telling small stories that still feel very universal—at the University of Cincinnati in the early '90s. They quickly bonded over Pavement, Guided By Voices, Dinosaur Jr. and Pixies, all of which, Scott points out, were "happening contemporarily at the time." Matt also hails from Cincinnati, though he likes to say that he grew up on the other side of the tracks.

LIGHTNING (VOL.2)

01. If I Had the World to Give - Bonnie 'Prince' Billy
02. Standing on the Moon - Phosphorescent & Friends
03. Cumberland Blues - Charles Bradley and Menahan Street Band
04. Ship of Fools - The Tallest Man on Earth & Friends
05. Bird Song - Bonnie 'Prince' Billy & Friends
06. Morning Dew - The National
07. Truckin' - Marijuana Deathsquads
08. Dark Star - Cass McCombs, Joe Russo & Friends
09. Nightfall of Diamonds - Nightfall of Diamonds
10. Transitive Refraction Axis for John Oswald - Tim Hecker
11. Going Down The Road Feelin' Bad - Lucinda Williams & Friends
12. Playing in the Band - Tunde Adebimpe, Lee Ranaldo & Friends
13. Stella Blue - Local Natives
14. Eyes of the World - Tal National
15. Help on the Way - Bela Fleck
16. Franklin's Tower - Orchestra Baobab
17. Till the Morning Comes - Luluc with Xylouris White
18. Ripple - The Walkmen
19. Brokedown Palace - Richard Reed Parry with Caroline Shaw and Little Scream (Featuring Garth Hudson)

For many years, Matt and Scott played together in the lo-fi garage-act Nancy. They eventually moved to Brooklyn and started to lay the groundwork for The National. Meanwhile, Aaron, Bryce and Bryan stayed close as they pursued various artistic and academic paths. They had some success with Project NIM, a rock combo with a female singer that rubbed elbows with The Meters' world and served as their graduate-school-introduction to the industry.

"At some point, I got really into Joy Division and New Order," Bryan says as he ponders the band's communal approach and the benefits of recycling his old iPhone as an iPod. "There's a lot of reducing of ideas."

BY 1999, BRYAN AND AARON linked up with Matt and Scott to work on The National and, soon after, Bryce joined in. Much like the Dead themselves, The National is an amalgamation of sounds and, especially early on, captured a very specific New York, via Midwest, experience. The band's music is ambitious, but still feels homey and intimate. Matt, who once sang on "Looking for Astronauts": "Throw from your window/ Your record collection/ They all run together and never make sense/ But that's how we like it, and that's all we want," sums up their DNA as "a mixture of a little Dead, a lot of New Order, some Psychedelic Furs and some Nick Cave."

While the band incubated, the five musicians were thrust into the dot-com bubble, mostly working in the digital space and publishing world. Aaron scored a job at the pioneering design company Funny Garbage—the people behind the first Cartoon Network website—as the assistant to John Carlin, who, in a separate but equal world, founded Red Hot. "We had a recording studio in our office and were making Red Hot albums and music for animation," Carlin says. "Aaron and Bryce played on some of the sessions after hours."

Though relegated to Brooklyn and Lower East Side art spaces

"The Dead came on mostly when Scott and his brother Bryan got together," Matt says."Bryan, especially, puts on the Dead just to kind of chill out and to get into the zone on the bus. Bryan and Scott both have big alt-rock collections, but the Dead was this comfort food."

Jay Blakesberg

at first, The National eventually started filling in the gaps between the coasts through blog buzz and grassroots touring. By the time they truly broke out with 2005's *Alligator* and its centerpiece, "Mr. November," the jamband scene was facing its own crossroads. Phish had recently broken up, Widespread Panic were reeling from the death of Michael Houser and the Dead's fragmentation was a hot-topic issue in *The New York Times*.

While the next generation of fierce improvisers continued to build steam on the club level, the scene began to splinter, as jambands—which have used eclecticism as a hallmark since the 1960s—began to incorporate a wider range of influences, including funk, electronica and even indie. For some bands, the party started to outweigh the music, and their infectious, Dionysian energy felt at odds with an increasingly dark political and economic backdrop. At the same time, indie-rock was on the rise, harnessing jam-nation's touring power, and bands like Arcade Fire started synthesizing artistic-minded music with a DIY bite. The National's stately elegance and virtuosity on 2007's *Boxer* and 2010's *High Violet* captured the hope and ambition of the social media revolution—and their moody post-punk was sympathetic for a generation coming of age during a recession. (Kaplan says the same thing happened when the "powerful wave" of punk distracted him from the Dead in the late '70s.)

When The National became successful, Aaron left his day job but remained close with Carlin and, in 2009, worked with Red Hot on *Dark Was the Night*. Both Dessners also grew into consummate collaborators and serial curators, whose résumés include festivals, performance art pieces and even a stray label or two.

"Aaron's leadership within The National is an amazing example of how someone can still use the format of a 'rock' band to evoke new sounds, textures and feelings to renew the genre and make it both classic and contemporary," Carlin says. "There is also a curatorial element that's about choosing and shaping a variety of contributors and sounds, as well as making them sound as good as they can."

Eventually, as the 2000s moved on, the once great divide between the indie and jamband scenes started to shrink. With the record industry struggling in the digital age, everyone from MCs and DJs to hipsters started to tour like jambands as a means of making money and spreading their music during a time when people seemed to be looking for an authentic experience—collaborating onstage, mixing in covers, offering a unique performance every night. Summer festivals started to "break" bands in the classic radio-station sense as music fans rallied around a certain eclectic, kaleidoscope energy. As the iPod era segued into the streaming era, music became more accessible and old-school genre divides gradually started to crumble in the face of instant access.

At the same time, a generation of psychedelic-loving music fans who grew up in the wake of the Phish revolution started to form bands of their own, and it became a parlor game to pick out the closet jammer in any indie band that scored a *Pitchfork* "Best New Music" slug. Phish reunited, Widespread Panic entered a new act with Jimmy Herring and the members of the Dead started to make peace.

In addition to third- and fourth-generation groups—like moe., The String Cheese Incident, the Disco Biscuits and Umphrey's McGee—who continued to tour, a new generation of "jamband revivalists" started to emerge on the local level, and another dimension of psych-rock acts found a middle ground between garage-rock and woodsy improvisation.

Though The National dipped their toes into the jam-rooted festival scene and occasionally referenced the Dead in interviews, the true day of reckoning took place in March of 2012 when Scott, Bryan and Aaron traveled to Marin County, Calif., to participate in a benefit for the nonprofit voter registration organization HeadCount at Weir's TRI Studios. Along with several of The National's touring members and the other all-stars who would eventually form the *Day of the Dead* house band, they backed Weir for a two-set show that mixed in Dead staples, politically charged covers and two National songs that Weir says he was "smitten with." Scott even managed to coax Weir into reintroducing "My Brother Esau" into his repertoire with a brand new verse by lyricist John Perry Barlow.

Drawing inspiration from Weir's playing circa *Europe '72*, Aaron says their goal for the session was to create a "crisp" wall of sound around the Dead guitarist. "At their best, the Dead were having this elastic conversation," Aaron says. "We were surrounded by all their old roadies and friends, and picked up on some of that energy. We tried to celebrate the songs."

"The guys in The National are impressive players, but it isn't so much about riffs as it is about massaging music out of their instruments," Weir points out. "There are technical musicians that are shortsighted in terms of how much music they're making with their instruments. These guys are not suffering from that kind of myopia. They're serving the song."

The collaboration worked and, both spiritually and logistically, inspired Aaron to dream up a Red Hot tribute to the Dead. His friendship with Weir's camp helped secure the licenses needed to record a tribute that truly encapsulated the Dead's music and, as musicians started reaching out, his net began to widen—though Carlin was a little skeptical at first.

"I'm from the punk generation, and the Dead were the old guard whose excesses were a bit much to take; although, in retrospect, some of the most seminal punk bands, such as Television, owed a lot to the Dead's improvisation and two-guitar approach. Aaron really wanted to showcase the Dead's songs," Carlin admits.

As the Dessners not-so-quietly started work on *Day of the Dead*, The National continued to revisit some of the bands that inspired them to play music in the first place. Along with Matt, the twins backed Gregg Allman on *The Colbert Report*. Matt and Bryan showed up on Anastasio's *Traveler,* and Weir joined The National onstage at two Bay Area venues—the Greek Theatre in 2014 and Golden Gate Park for Outside Lands in 2013. (Right before the TRI jam, Anastasio also sat in with The National at the Beacon Theatre in New York.)

"It comes from having a common language, from growing up with the same influences," Weir says of the

literal and emotional brotherly bond he sees in The National. "If I played something with a Chuck Berry or Dylan-esque feel, the guys in the Dead would hear that and react. It would emerge and blossom right there onstage. Not a lot of folks have that bond and it needs to be nurtured for a long time. But the guys in The National are capable of doing that."

Carlin adds: "Aaron and Bryce can blend their impeccable taste and different perspectives into a seamless whole. The ability to make great work, as well as have the generosity to invite collaborators and find a way for them to shine, is a rare and beautiful thing."

"We had to be very confident in the basis of these songs, take it serious and have high standards as we honed our craft," Aaron says of The National's formative years. "We were writing songs for Matt to sing, but you can hear the folkish influences in our playing. The experimental textures come from just having been exposed to this type of music early on."

FAR FROM JUST AN "INDIE-ROCK tribute to the Dead," *Day of the Dead* also boasts banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck, bassist Edgar Meyer and The Wood Brothers' frontman Oliver Wood on an acoustic, rustic "Help on the Way;" 80-year-old minimalist composer Terry Riley's twist on "Estimated Prophet;" pianist Vijay Iyer's jazz variation of "King Solomon's Marbles;" Lucinda Williams & Friends' chugging "Goin' Down the Road Feeling Bad;" and a piece of music by electronic/noise musician Tim Hecker in the style of John Oswald's "plunderphonics" album, *Grayfolded*. Some artists submitted their tracks remotely; others hunkered down with the Dessners and their house band at two country churches in Upstate New York to channel those *American Beauty* vibes.

The sessions also had a lasting effect on Weir, who has gradually outgrown his reputation as the Dead's "little brother" to emerge as the torchbearer of their legacy. After bonding with Kaufman—who served as a co-producer on *Day of the Dead*—at TRI, Weir started working on a new set of cowboy tunes that will blend his stable of Bay Area pals with many *Day of the Dead* participants, including Scott, Aaron, Doucette and Russo. Josh Ritter also signed on as a songwriter.

Key *Day of the Dead* collaborator Doucette first met Bryan through indie-rock circles, and the drummers became fast friends—he attended Fare Thee Well with the Devendorfs this past July. He says that when Bryan would sit in with his band, they would "cheerfully debate who was Mickey and who was Billy." He's been able to witness Weir's renaissance first hand. "What sets Bob apart is an inspiring desire to carve his own space in a piece of music," Doucette says. "He's creative and headstrong enough to know that it doesn't do a song or the players any good to be merely content and mildly blending in. Instead, he seeks to cross into a song's fourth dimension, weaving his way in and around the pathways of a song, not apparent to either listener or even performer. He's often said that he found great inspiration in the playing of McCoy Tyner, particularly Tyner's left hand, which supported the song with unlikely and inventive parts."

Aaron also points to the "closeness" that he's formed with Weir in recent years and describes their onstage collaborations as career highlights. Sitting on the floor of his den—listening back to Lucius' bouncy "Uncle John's Band," Unknown Mortal Orchestra's Prince-like "Shakedown Street," Tal National's Zappa-style "Eyes of the World" and a hardcore reworking of "Cream Puff War" by Fucked Up that will surely scare the children—Aaron flips through the old Dead records that are spilling out of his cabinet. The vibe recalls the Dessners' early days discovering the Dead's music in their bedroom. Bryce notes Riley's contributions, explaining, "He's senior to the Dead and almost unaware of the music itself, but he's from the same town and they were totally part of the same universe."

While in the studio, the house band kept their focus on the Dead's songs, particularly Garcia's work with Robert Hunter, but they weren't afraid to stretch out as the tape ran. Aaron mentions a pair of "Dark Stars" that pushed toward the 20-minute mark and a choice 10-minute version of "Playing in the Band" with Ranaldo and Tunde Adebimpe. The Dessners looked to the Dead's early-'70s period as a rallying point, especially given the country and church studio settings. (Aaron says they had around 70 ideas in the works, but eventually culled 59 complete statements for the final release.) Some artists had their own requests. "Jim James wanted to do 'Candyman,'" Aaron says. "We'd recorded the music and sent it to him, and he just sent it back in like 30 minutes and said, 'Dude, I've sang this song 11,000 times.'"

Even before they started working on *Day of the Dead*, the members of The National and Grizzly Bear joked about starting a Dead cover band, so they naturally tackled "Terrapin Station," one of the most complicated songs in the Garcia/Hunter catalog, together. "If you listen to Grizzly Bear's music and hear them as players, they have the feel and the sensibility of the Dead," Aaron admits, noting that they recorded the full "Terrapin" suite the Dead never played live. "They possess a real, high level of musicianship and there is nuance in their playing. Daniel Rossen was nervous at first, but his voice makes the song feel timeless. I love it as much as when Jerry would sing it."

On the flip side, Aaron made a point to weave in some left-field choices like the Jerry Garcia Band favorite "Reuben and Cerise," which the Grateful Dead only played during their final years. "It's cool to hear a song that some people might not know in the context of these other songs," he says with a prankster grin. "That song is pretty involved—it's long—and has a tricky timing. We ran through it a few times and then, Will absolutely nailed it." Like-wise, Aaron handpicked Garcia folk ditties like "Jack-a-Roe" and "Shady Grove" in order to explore "all the different aspects of Jerry as a musician." They narrowed in on a sense of loneliness and yearning that, like both The National and Garcia, felt high-brow in style, yet populist in perspective.

Aaron's decision to include "Standing on the Moon" stems from a conversation he had with Weir. "That song has a particular emotional quality for many people and definitely for Bob," Aaron says of the '80s Dead ballad, which Phosphorescent sings. "It reminds me of latter-day Dylan, with this sense of mortality and looking back—the sense that Jerry's not here anymore but you can feel him." Another "goose bump" moment happened during the church session for "If I Had the World to Give," which was recorded in a single take and showcased the Dead's oft-overlooked vocal skills.

Australian-born Barnettt, a relatively new convert, first heard the Dead five years ago. She was quickly struck by their "communal vibes" and started "pouring through their music and got really into singing harmonies." When it came time to hone in on "New Speedway Boogie," she "listened to a couple of different recordings, but didn't want to just copy what they'd already done [and] tried to forget what [she] had heard." She ended up jamming in the studio and, as she puts it, "started again in my head and saw what path it went down."

Vile, who snagged "Box of Rain," believes that the Dead influenced his music "sub-liminally, through osmosis—riffs, grooves and melodies certainly morph into your subconscious after a while." As he explains, "I was listening to *American Beauty* in my van on cassette, when I was invited to be on this compilation and 'Box of Rain' really moved me. J loved it lots too, so we had him rip a solo in the middle of it, and it morphed into him singing."

Other sessions were less calculated. During 'Wharf Rat,'" the house band waded into a calm, textured, sonic wave after, Aaron says, Kaplan "started directing traffic."

Outside the house band tracks, the compilation's best super-jam pairing is the long-in-the-works collaboration between Vernon and Hornsby. Vernon added some spiraling guitar riffs to the end of "Slow Show" with The National at the Dark Was the Night show that revealed a previously under-stated Crazy Horse influence, and it turns out that his story mirrors the Dessners. He grew up in the Midwest immersed in the Dead's shadow, but always had open ears and eventually found fame in the indie-folk world. For his contribution he reunited his childhood band DeYarmond Edison (whose other members later spun off into the psych-folk group Megafaun and have covered Phish's narrative "Icculus"). Hornsby stopped by Vernon's Eau Claire studio and regaled them with stories of his time as an auxiliary member of the Dead. "Justin and his crew decided we should do 'Black Muddy River' because they were big fans of the version from my 2000 album, *Here Come the Noise Makers,*" Hornsby says. "The indie world used to look down the Dead's nose, but they have one of the greatest song-books in American popular music."

When it came to choosing what songs The National proper would record for the collection, Aaron says he tried to "shine a light on what was important to us about the Grateful Dead." They eventually went with Dead-adopted folk ballads "Morning Dew" and "Peggy-O," two numbers that ignited the Dessners' love of roots music over 25 years ago. Aaron says their harrowing version of "Peggy-O" was partially an experiment to see what it would be like for Matt to sing so many verses. The song has already entered The National's live repertoire.

SUNSHINE (VOL.3)

01. Here Comes Sunshine - Real Estate
02. Shakedown Street - Unknown Mortal Orchestra
03. Brown-Eyed Women - Hiss Golden Messenger
04. Jack-A-Roe - This Is the Kit
05. High Time - Daniel Rossen and Christopher Bear
06. Dire Wolf - The Lone Bellow & Friends
07. Althea - Winston Marshall, Kodiak Blue and Shura
08. Clementine Jam - Orchestra Baobab
09. China Cat Sunflower -> I Know You Rider - Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks
10. Easy Wind - Bill Callahan
11. Wharf Rat - Ira Kaplan & Friends
12. Estimated Prophet - The Rileys
13. Drums -> Space - Man Forever, So Percussion and Oneida
14. Cream Puff War - Fucked Up
15. Dark Star - The Flaming Lips
16. What's Become of the Baby - stargaze
17. King Solomon's Marbles - Vijay Iyer
18. Rosemary - Mina Tindle & Friends
19. And We Bid You Goodnight - Sam Amidon
20. I Know You Rider (live) - The National with Bob Weir

THE NATIONAL'S DIASPORA now stretches far outside Ditmas Park, the Brooklyn town-on-the-edge-of-the-city neighborhood that fostered their growth. Bryce divides his time between France and his cabin near Woodstock, N.Y.; Matt lives in Venice Beach, Calif.; Scott moved out of the city to Long Island; and Bryan relocated home to Cincinnati. They've also spent their downtime exploring wide-ranging side-projects: Matt is one half of the dancey EL VY, the Devendorfs formed the Neu!/krautrock trio LNZNDRF as an outlet to try out grooves that aren't far from the Dead's jams, and Bryce has gotten even deeper into his classical work—he recently worked on the score for an Academy Award-winning film. "The Dead were influenced by the Beat poets, and you can see that same ambition with these orchestras," Bryce says.

The National are also inching toward their first album since 2013's *Trouble Will Find Me*, which helped the group ascend to U.S. arenas. It remains to be seen how much of the Dead project will rub off, but Matt says, "We are writing in a different way—with all of us in a room playing together and seeing what comes out of that. Other records were done with little ideas being emailed back and forth while we worked on them privately. I'm sure that has something to do with the process they went through recording all these different bands for this Dead record. While I don't think our next record is going to sound like the Dead, that sense of community has influenced our process and that creative mojo has gotten everyone excited." He pauses and adds, "On a musical level, there's a little bit of the Dead in everything The National does and also a little bit of the Dead in every American band."

Day of the Dead has also changed how Weir views his band's legacy. "It was easy for me to take for granted what we were doing 25 years ago," he says. "It's a little like looking at your face in the mirror. You can't tell what you look like, and then you look at a picture of yourself from a few decades ago and think, 'Wow, there's an odd-looking dude.' You see some character that perhaps you weren't able to wrap your mind around. It's like that with our music. Deep inside, we knew that we were up to something of some consequence, but now this surge of people from all walks of life has been hammering us with how important the music is to them, including a lot of musicians I really respect. After a while, that starts to sink in, and I take what we did more seriously. I still consider what we're doing a work in progress."

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Reviews

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

BEN HARPER & THE INNOCENT CRIMINALS

Call It What It Is STAX/CONCORD

Against the roiling backdrop of an overheated election year and high-profile moments of message-heavy black expression writ large—Beyoncé's Super Bowl performance and Kendrick Lamar's eye-popping turn at the Grammys being two of the most indelible—it seems only natural that **Ben Harper** should come out with a new album. Social activism has always played a role in his music—tempered, to be sure, with a mystical aura that recalls his hero Bob Marley, who made the balancing act between protest and provocation an art form unto itself.

The title track of *Call It What It Is*, which also marks the return of Harper's long-running band **The Innocent Criminals**—reunited in 2015 after a seven-year hiatus—pretty much sets the tone. "They shot him in the back; now it's a crime to be black," Harper sings over a gutbucket slide-guitar blues riff, as drummer **Oliver Charles** punctuates the chorus of "Call it what it is...murder!" with a *pop-pop-pop* on the snare. It's simple, stark and direct, taking up the topics of racism, police brutality and #BlackLivesMatter while stressing that we can all participate in the solution, cops and govern-ment included.

Harper explores variations on the theme, whether it's a longing for the revolutionary idealism of simpler times (on the hard-rocking "When Sex Was Dirty") or a lament, cross-stitched with hope, on the divisiveness of American politics (on the reggae-fueled "Finding Our Way"). But he's also a romantic at heart and never gets caught up in preachiness or polemics. "Shine," with its creamy organ hook and bouncy beat, is all love and heartbreak, while the thrashy single "Pink Balloon" conjures up a free-spirited femme fatale for the ages.

When Harper and The Innocent Criminals rocked The Fillmore in San Francisco for their first reunion shows last year, the blueprint for *Call It What It Is* was already drawn. Before rehearsals even started, Harper decided first to throw the new songs at them in the studio, going straight for the jugular. It was a calculated risk that paid off, with the band sounding fresh, inventive and unquestionably on fire. Breaking up is hard to do, but as Harper himself has noted, who knew making up could feel this sweet?

Bill Murphy

Iggy Pop

Iggy Pop
Post Pop Depression LOMA VISTA/CONCORD

If this album is truly **Iggy Pop**'s last dance, as he hinted in a recent interview, then at least he's going out in style. Co-created with Queens of the Stone Age's **Josh Homme**, *Post Pop Depression* has all the rebel swagger and attitude that you'd expect from a guy who, at 68, somehow still personifies the mischievous, snarling id of rock-and-roll, even as he strips it down to a gritty, mortal essence that only a true lifer understands. "I'm not the man with everything; I've nothing but my name," he croons toward the end of "American Valhalla," a ride-into-the-sunset that finds him confronting the inevitable with a warrior's creed. Sure, it might sound morose, but in Iggy's hands—backed by Homme and his Queens bandmate **Dean Fertita** on guitars and multiple instruments, with the Arctic Monkeys' **Matt Helders** on drums—the sentiment becomes sensual, almost irresistible. And that's where *Post Pop* gets its strength; from the Berlin-Bowie throwback "German Days" to the throbbing Eno-esque single "Gardenia," the album swerves and dips like a rock bacchanal that most young bands today would kill for. Homme and company have a lot to do with that, but at this point in his storied career, Iggy also clearly revels in the freedom of doing whatever the fuck he wants. He's earned it. ***Bill Murphy***

Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros
PersonA COMMUNITY

Los Angeles collective **Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros** may forever be known for their mega indie hit "Home," also known as the first dance at your hipster cousin's wedding. And while the song's friendly folkster-in-love vibe is still representative of the group's work, their fourth album, *PersonA*, tones down the cuteness for a more nuanced set of tunes. The most notable shift in *PersonA* is the absence of co-singer Jade Castrinos, whose playful lyrical banter with Sharpe (lead singer **Alex Ebert**) defined the band's sound. The album opens with the lovely, barely-there guitar intro to "Hot Coals," a seven-minute track that wafts like smoke until breaking into a gorgeous groove with brushed percussion and cascading piano. An echoing trumpet cuts through the sounds and church organs climb before the whole thing crumbles into silence. It's a statement—this album is something more. Recorded in New Orleans, horns pepper the songs throughout. Still, Sharpe's folk-spirit presence presides; on the jazzy "Wake Up the Sun," he's "tired of Buddha, so bored of Abraham. I'm tired of Krishna, feels good to say I am." And first single "No Love Like Yours" shows that Sharpe can still churn out a fun, folk anthem. Growth sounds great on *PersonA*. ***Justin Jacobs***

Yeasayer
Amen & Goodbye MUTE

Given the four-year delay after (and mixed critical reception to) **Yeasayer**'s last art-pop opus, *Fragrant World*, it was easy to worry that the Brooklyn trio had lost momentum. Turns out, they'd just locked themselves deep in the lab: *Amen & Goodbye*, their fourth LP, rewards patience with a kaleidoscopic song cycle constructed with architectural precision. The band emerges through a vocoder fog into "I Am Chemistry," a kooky epic that is part synth-prog, part church cookout sing-along, part electro-rock science lecture. ("I'm digoxin from the foxglove plant / The last remaining VX from Anniston," they sing, somehow twisting that heady mouthful into a hook.) From there, the band begs their usual question: Are they the world's freakiest pop act or catchiest oddball rockers? The fun is attempting—and failing—to answer that question. "Silly Me," with its core synth-pop structure, could be a Katy Perry song, were it not for the sophisticated sonic touches: the honking acoustic guitar plucks, the hand drums, the saxophone. The exotic bubblegum funk of "Dead Sea Scrolls" somehow conjures Nick Jonas collaborating with Beck circa *Midnite Vultures*. *Amen & Goodbye*, like Yeasayer's most engrossing work, thrives on this entrancing fluidity. ***Ryan Reed***

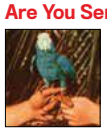
Charles Bradley
Changes DUNHAM/DAPTONE

Although the fired-up spirit of James Brown hovers consistently over the work of **Charles Bradley**, what makes him such a modern soul original is the depth of tenderness, commitment and selfless dedication he brings to his music. To be sure, the Godfather wasn't any less driven as a singer, but with Bradley, there's a vulnerability—an unshakable veil of sadness—that lends gut-punching power to songs like "Nobody But You" and "You Think I Don't Know (But I Know)" from *Changes*, his third album with producer **Thomas Brenneck** (best known for his guitar work with The Dap-Kings). At this point, the overall mood and sound—vintage rare-groove soul, replete with meticulously arranged horns and a wound-up-tight rhythm section—has become a familiar, and winning, formula. What's really changed, or rather expanded, is the scope: From the Funkadelicized "Ain't Gonna Give It Up" (with deft backing vocals by **Saundra Williams** and **Starr Duncan Lowe**, collectively known as **Saun & Starr**) to the compact, infectious beat of "Good to Be Back Home" and the churchy confessional vibes of the title track, Bradley sheds light on some entirely new facets of his restless imagination. At 67, he's still a youthful gamer with a voice that can set a house on fire. ***Bill Murphy***

Esperanza Spalding
Emily's D+Evolution CONCORD

With *Emily's D+Evolution*, **Esperanza Spalding** makes the big leap from jazz's young hotshot bassist/vocalist to polyglot artist with an expansive, embracing vision. Co-produced by **Tony Visconti** (Bowie's longtime helmsman), it's the audio element of a larger-scale concept—one encompassing eye-popping visuals, fancy-schmancy staging, choreography and more. Emily, her middle name, is a character within (though not in an obvious, Ziggy Stardust sort of way), based on Spalding's childhood self; the songs, she has said, are connected thematically, though *how* isn't always readily clear. Not that it matters much whether they are or aren't. What becomes immediately apparent to anyone who's followed her to this point is that this is daring, exciting new ground for Esperanza Spalding. If she occasionally teased at interests falling outside of the jazz realm before, then she goes for it big-time here—although she is constitutionally incapable of leaving her experimental jazz sensibilities fully behind. "Noble Nobles" is of the Joni Mitchell singer-songwriter school, while opener "Good Lava" is power rock via prog-soul, Spalding's vocal calisthenics riffing this way and that on the simple lyric "See this pretty girl flow, wait 'til you feel it." Twisted time signatures and layered vocals mark "Ebony And Ivy," while "Farewell Dolly" is lysergically baroque. Working with a remarkably flexible band built around guitarist **Matthew Stevens**, drummer **Karriem Riggins** and her own bass—yes, she remains a wicked practitioner of her chosen axe—*Emily's D+Evolution* is Spalding's step out into something else altogether. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Andrew Bird
Are You Serious LOMA VISTA



Surely there's no way in hell that **Andrew Bird**, known for his protective layers of metaphor and arch penchant for navel-gazing, could strip away his insecurities to find the soul of Bill Withers. But that's exactly what happens on "Capsized," the leadoff single from the singer and violinist's 10th album. It might just be the funkiest—not to mention the most personal—song he's ever done, and of course, it's just one of many different approaches he takes on *Are You Serious* (no question mark, in yet another Bird-worthy point of ambiguity). Tracked and produced by **Tony Berg** in LA with a smoking-hot band that includes guitarist **Blake Mills** and the ever-incisive **Fiona Apple** (who guests on the old-timey, acoustic, salon ditty "Left Handed Kisses"), the album does indeed transport Bird to solemn, sometimes brutal ground. On the deceptively upbeat "Truth Lies Low," he digs into the blame game and all its dark permutations, while on the epic "Valleys of the Young," he wrestles with the beauty and terror of bringing a child into the world ("Our hearts are constantly breaking/ from their cradle to our grave/ is it selfish/ is it brave?"). In fact, Bird seems to have shocked himself with his own vulnerability, but the revelation plays to his strengths; when his voice cracks on "believe in this holy valley," you know he means it. ***Bill Murphy***

Steve Kimock
Last Danger of Frost
SELF-RELEASED

The first truly solo **Steve Kimock** album is a luxurious treat. Liberated from a band and even a rhythm section, *Last Danger of Frost* finds the former Zero guitarist overdubbing himself, playing with a nuanced sweetness and, on almost each track, pointing a direct course toward his bliss. Though a veteran of the San Francisco jam ooze, *Last Danger* places Kimock more in league with the contemporary solo guitar scene—or perhaps the gently echoing space-jazz of Bill Frisell—making music that is simultaneously extremely restrained and massively open. On the two-part acoustic "Surely This Day," Kimock carves slow and cooling slide-guitar melodies like water down slate, each of the layered parts a distinct performance with its own corners and turns. On the four-part "Music Tells a Story" suite, Kimock's guitar transforms into tempered electronics, biomusic pulses and synth sweeps, as if he were playing beneath the surface of a vast underwater lake in some '90s video game. It's a welcome new mode of performance for the 60-year-old guitarist, unshackled from the remotest notion of groove or live audience or anything besides the cosmos he still has yet to discover inside his guitar. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Wolfmother
Victorious UNIVERSAL

When **Wolfmother** broke out with their self-titled debut in 2005, they felt like a revelation. The Australian band were reimagining heavy metal in a way that felt like a grandiose '80s throwback as well as a raucous good time, especially when it came to their live show. Now, with *Victorious*, the band's fourth album, that sound hasn't changed much and it doesn't feel quite as fresh. The songs are energetic and impassioned, sure, but there's something slightly gimmicky about the hard rock that pulses through the songs. Still, the tracks here

are solid and entertaining. From the boisterous grit of the title track, which allows frontman **Andrew Stockdale** to fully explore his dramatic falsetto, to the thumping rock-and-roll fervor of "City Lights," Wolfmother is still a fun band who want to make unabashed rock songs driven by the surge of an electric guitar—something that does not often feel true in music these days. Producer **Brendan O'Brien**'s past work with AC/DC and Pearl Jam shows, especially on songs like the rousing number "Best of a Bad Situation," which pairs swaggering heavy-rock tones with catchy hooks. Wolfmother gets credit for bringing the rock into a scene where there is so little, but this album may leave you wanting more. ***Emily Zemler***

Explosions in the Sky
The Wilderness
TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LTD.

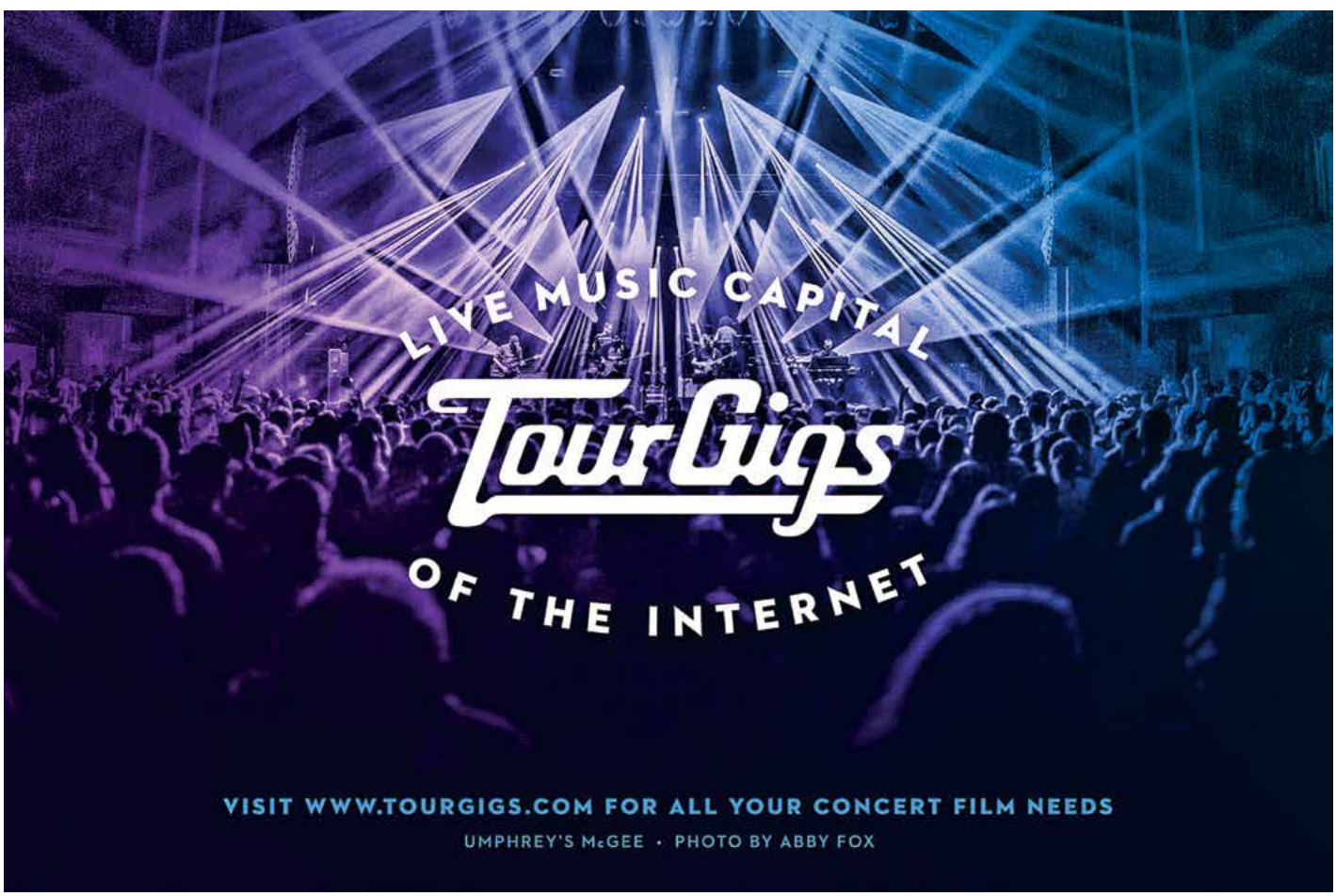
Over the past decade, **Explosions in the Sky**'s cosmic-sized instrumentals have provided soundtracks to sports dramas, comedies and war films alike—but their style was cinematic even before they broke into Hollywood, using webs of electric guitar and drums to muster complex feelings that words couldn't. *The Wilderness*, their seventh LP (and first non-score since 2011) finds the quartet functioning as a limitless rock orchestra, exploring bold new arrangements and textures. "Logic of a Dream" is more nightmare than their usual teary-eyed reverie, piling on militant percussion and rocket-launch distortion. "Losing the Light" is a soft flurry of cello, piano and looped feedback—instead of climbing to an obvious crescendo, it lingers in this wintry atmosphere for six full minutes. And even when the quiet-loud dynamic recalls classic Explosions, the nuances feel fresh. "Colors in Space" lurches into a motorik lunar throb—wringing out maximum catharsis from a single splintered chord, and "Disintegration Anxiety" showcases an unexpected buoyancy with its Bonham-styled drum groove and math-rock guitar jitters—the closest to "funky" they've ever ventured. It would be easy for Explosions in the Sky to settle into a formulaic middle age. But as *The Wilderness* proves, their evolution is far from finished. ***Ryan Reed***

theNEWDEAL
Mercury Switch SELF-RELEASED

Canadian livetronica trio **theNEWDEAL** hold the jamband mantra of "tour much, record little" tightly to their chests. The band's last studio album was back in 2003 and, since then, they have toured extensively on the strength of live recordings and word of mouth. They called it quits back in 2012, but returned to the stage in 2014 with new drummer **Joel Stouffer** (who plays with bassist **Dan Kurtz** in electro-pop act Dragonette). But they waited two more years to drop a new studio album and, finally, *Mercury Switch* has arrived. The album is a natural extension of the trio's live show, albeit cleaned up with glistening studio sheen—straightforward, trance-y, 4/4 dance beats and keyboard lines that bounce between melodic video-game beeps and chunkier, strobe light synths, courtesy of **Jamie Shields**. *Mercury Switch* doesn't waste any time hitting the dance floor. Opener "Dark One" blasts out of the gate sounding like a ticking time bomb that explodes with a rattling bassline. In a live set, steady bangers can be great. But *Mercury Switch* would've benefited from some more varied tempos and moods—just one offering, the snaking "Easy Lazy," slows things down and takes a breath. With only seven tracks, the near-nonstop, throbbing intensity doesn't get too exhausting, yet a few more left-field cuts could've made *Mercury Switch* a more rewarding listen. ***Justin Jacobs***

Luther Dickinson
Blues & Ballads: A Folksinger's Songbook: Volumes I & II
NEW WEST

When the ghosts rise from the backwoods swamps and churches, from the juke joints and railyards, and have themselves a party, they'll cue up **Luther Dickinson**'s *Blues & Ballads: A Folksinger's Songbook: Volumes I & II* as their soundtrack. With the help of **The Cooperators**, and some very smart choices he makes as producer, Dickinson tracks down-home themes of time immemorial; moonshine and mojo, mean ol' winds and shakin' yo mama, with the uncluttered clarity of a summer night on a Mississippi front porch. Friends like **Mavis Staples**, **JJ Grey** and **Jason Isbell** drop by, and Luther knows exactly how to accommodate his guests, but it's the totality of the 21 cuts that impresses most. Songwriting traditions find respect and renewal. Instruments and voices are permitted to be real and unaffected. Lyrics are poetry, personal and eternal, revealing and repairing the hurt. As for those very smart choices, like fortifying the shuffle on "Bang Bang Lulu" with barrelhouse piano and a Bo Diddley beat or boiling it down to the bones of just Luther and his guitar on "Jackson," they create a mood deeply, richly Southern without a trace of caricature. These aren't standards reimagined. These are songs as modern as they are historical, carrying forward folk blues as an art form as they tell Dickinson's story. In a sense, it's a concept album spooled around the old blues adage of feeling good about feeling bad, and this is an album that feels really good. Just be ready for the ghosts. ***Larson Sutton***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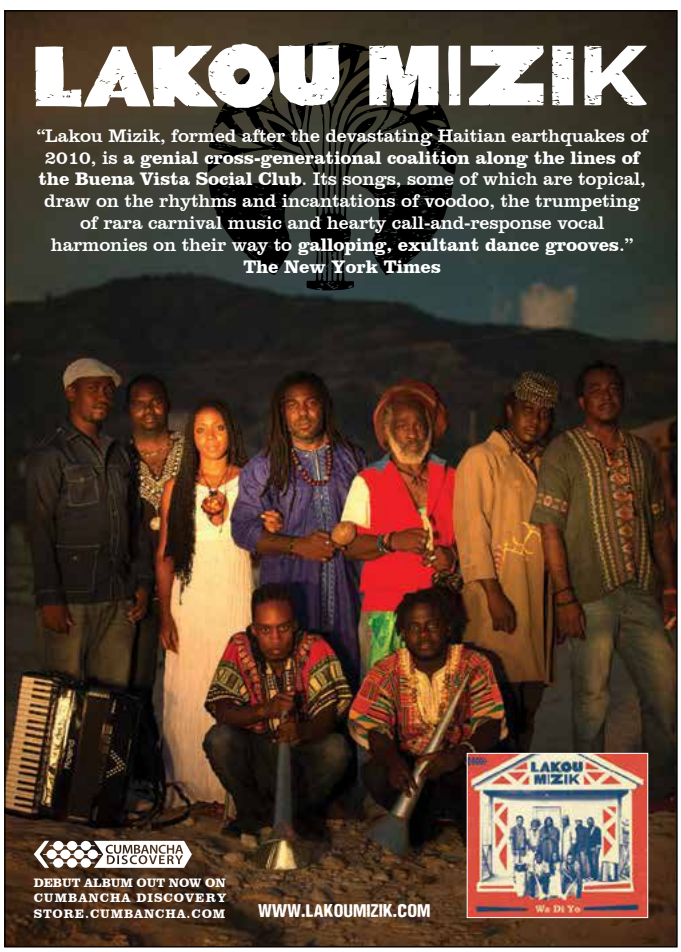
LAKOU MIZIK
"Lakou Mizik, formed after the devastating Haitian earthquakes of 2010, is a genial cross-generational coalition along the lines of the Buena Vista Social Club. Its songs, some of which are topical, draw on the rhythms and incantations of voodoo, the trumpeting of rara carnival music and hearty call-and-response vocal harmonies on their way to galloping, exultant dance grooves."
The New York Times
CUMBANCHA DISCOVERY
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WWW.LAKOUMIZIK.COM
LAKOU MIZIK
Wa Di Yo

Reviews

Woods

City Sun Eater in the River of Light

WOODSIST

Few modern indie bands have a dual streak of consistency and productivity quite like **Woods**. The Brooklyn act has only been kicking around since 2005, yet *City Sun Eater in the River of Light* is already their tenth album. *City Sun* finds Woods' sound blossoming out from their familiar blissed-out folk in a more rhythmic, groove-based direction. Opener "Sun City Creeps" begins with some warm horns before a spidery guitar sets up the groove. Like much of the album, the six-minute track isn't in a hurry to unfold, but chugs along with tambourines and a simple, effective bassline. Frontman **Jeremy Earl**'s falsetto quivers as he delivers populist lyrics like, "We fall into love every day and take as we go." The horns return on "The Take," adding some bright, new color to the otherwise smoky, meditative cut. Whereas, on past Woods albums, a song's squelching guitar workout might spin on and on, here, it's reined in, tucked back into the rhythm after a minute. The breezy, strumming Woods of yore still exists here ("Morning Light," "Hang It on Your Wall"), but the album's tighter tracks make for the band's best batch of catchy, psych-rock nuggets since 2011's neo-classic *Sun and Shade*. *City Sun* will eat you up if you let it.

Justin Jacobs

Ray LaMontagne

Ouroboros RCA

Jim James' production influence is especially profound on *Ouroboros*, **Ray LaMontagne**'s sixth album, making it the most drastic departure of his career. A hodgepodge of tones, textures and ambient atmospherics, these haunting mood pieces veer dramatically from the dusty veneer that once brought the Grammy winner comparisons to The Band, Van Morrison, Tim Buckley, Stephen Stills and others of a slightly tattered edge. If anything, *Ouroboros* resembles a Pink Floyd album of their earlier variety, with songs such as "While It Still Beats," "In My Own Way" and "The Changing Man" suggesting some sort of cosmic illumination. However, there's also a darker side to several of these songs, which can make a preliminary listen a somewhat intimidating encounter. Nevertheless, LaMontagne takes pains to offer reassurance on the opening track and first single, the aptly named "Hey, No Pressure." "Anything you want your life to mean, it can mean." It's a lesson he's taken to heart here, given these left-of-center melodies and their freewheeling deliveries. And while it shatters any stereotypes that his earlier albums might have left in their wakes, the album is a testament to both his and James' willingness to experiment and tamper with the template. It's little wonder that, given its laborious musings, *Ouroboros* isn't an album that fully gels through a single listen. With time, however, it appears quite profound.

Lee Zimmerman

Ear Crystals

BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Outstanding in their field. During their early-'70s heyday, organic, DIY, Swedish improvising rockers **Träd, Gräs och Stenar** (Trees, Grass and Stones) challenged listeners' temporal limits with long-form dual-guitar jams that pleased the gods' ears with their patience, communicative skills and life-affirming pleasure quotients. Long out of print, TG&S's live albums *Djungelns Lag* (The Law of the Jungle) and *Mors Mors* (Mother Mother) have been reissued, along with *Kom Tillsammans* (Come Together), a previously unreleased package of live '72 head-meltery—with hours of bonus material. Whether jamming out to the Stones' "Last Time" or whipping out a jaw harp for a traditional folk ditty, these nature boys were about as megadelic as it got.

Gramophone home. My favorite new fetish object—by far—is **Robert Millis**' *Indian Talking Machine: 78 RPM Record and Gramophone Collecting on the Sub-Continent* (Sublime Frequencies). Millis spent a year amid Indian record collectors' dusty abodes full of shellac, and his book is a visual testament to the all-things-must-pass nature of accumulation. The beautifully designed package contains two CDs' worth of hissy beauty, three-minute snapshots of Indian classical music performed by singers and sitarists, as well as the occasional kazoo and seven-stringed violin. The music is as otherworldly as the apparatuses that once delivered it.

Swing, you sinners. During the pre-Hays Code '30s, Fleischer Studios' cartoons purveyed family-friendly sexual innuendo from scantily clad vixens, giant circus clowns, talking dogs, unmarried mothers and horny sailors amid luridly pulsating black-and-white backgrounds. Guitarist **Gary Lucas**, singer **Sarah Stiles** and their flippy-floppy jass combo reanimate the music of these debaucherously delightful Betty Boop and Popeye cartoons on *Fleischerei!* (Cuneiform). Lucas' dazzling slide guitar work and Stiles' saucy soprano will teleport you to some of the pre-war America's trippier environments. You'll want to listen to songs like "The Broken Record" on permanent repeat.

Bugging out. The all-female Japanese trio called **Nisennenmondai** (or "Y2K bug") hooked up with heroic U.K. reggae producer **Adrian Sherwood** for #N/A (On-U Sound), an album of long, raw, double-digit grooves dubbed up in real time. Guitar, bass and drums lock into place fairly quickly for as long as 16 minutes during hypnotic instrumental workouts that reference krautrock, no wave, disco, post-punk and minimalism. Sherwood's touch is subtler than usual, most apparent in minor metallic moves reminiscent of spanners being tossed around an auto-repair shop, or metal abusing metal. You can almost see the sparks fly and smell the grease in the air as the quartet gets down and dirty.

Kevin Morby

Singing Saw DEAD OCEANS

There's a haunting desert-cantina-of-the-soul quality to the songs on **Kevin Morby**'s third solo studio album. "If you find water, please call my name," he sings on "Water." The songs are meta-musical—about unforgettable songs, or menacing singing saws or the sound of an old piano. The theme of losing one's mind pops up a few times, too. But it's not really a record about madness. Morby has been carving out his own stark and poetic place since leaving Woods. Leonard Cohen is still the dominant stylistic connection, particularly with the somber half-spoken vocals, but Morby does something interesting with repetition in his lyrics, turning them into hypnotic incantations. The Velvet Underground come to mind, too, as does *Self-Portrait*-era Dylan, with the gospel-tinged female backing vocals. Morby is a master of brooding songs that pivot between two chords, with the tension provided by lyrical detail, open spaces or vocal harmonies. Rain, storms, plants, gardens and mystical animals populate many of these songs. Not long ago, Morby moved into a house with an old piano, and he started teaching himself how to play while writing these songs. His skeletal, descending playing accents numbers like "Ferris Wheel."

John Adamian

M83

Junk MUTE

The smart bet on **M83**'s seventh album, *Junk*, is that it can't possibly match the epic heights of its predecessor, the expansive 2011 double-LP *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming*. But band mastermind **Anthony Gonzalez** avoided the comparisons altogether by veering away from his reliable stadium-sized synth-rock into unexpected new territory—including house music (electro-symphonic anthem "Do It, Try It"), vocoder funk (sax-laced "Walkway Blues") and Rhodes piano balladry ("For the Kids"). By indulging the hidden corners of his record collection and defying expectations, he circumvents the pressure of following a bona fide modern classic—it's easy to imagine Gonzalez muttering to himself, "Why the fuck not?" in the studio. "Tension" is a spacey slow-jam instrumental—in another life, it could have soundtracked a John Hughes rom-com; "Moon Crystal" rides upbeat keys and strings into a cheese-tastic jazz-pop groove—you can practically visualize the freeze-framed intro credits to a dated American sitcom. There are no towering radio masterpieces here (à la "Midnight City"), but *Junk*'s playful, anything-goes charm digs deeper than the more cohesive *Dreaming*. With its savvy eclecticism, it offers a wider spectrum of Gonzalez's varied talents. *Ryan Reed*

Sam Beam & Jesca Hoop

Love Letter for Fire SUB POP

Duets naturally arrive at a conversational, kinetic charm that solo songs can't. With *Love Letter for Fire*, Iron & Wine's **Sam Beam** and singer-songwriter **Jesca Hoop** aim to channel the rapport of Kenny Rogers/Dolly Parton or George Jones/Tammy Wynette classics—where two singular voices merge in a dialogue that deepens the atmosphere. Each musician boasts a skill the other doesn't—with Hoop's vivacious, multi-hued sweetness brightening Beam's smoky rumble and croon. Blending their voices in harmony, call-and-response and unison, they sing of love, spirituality and world-weary perseverance, often all at once. Their ace backing band, which includes Wilco percussionist **Glenn Kotche** and violinist/violist **Eyvind Kang**, flutters behind with minimalist arrangements drawing from traditional folk ballads, jazz, bluegrass and blues. "Midas Tongue" is a funky blues roller coaster, reminiscent of Iron & Wine's "Woman King," highlighted by brooding strings and Hoop's heavy-breath percussion. "Know the Wild That Wants You" is an intricate vocal harmony showcase, with the singers pleading with each other to "heal your own heart." *Love Letter for Fire* is built on this elegant give-and-take—it's the rare A-list collaboration more compelling than the sum of its parts.

Ryan Reed

Black Mountain

IV JAGJAGUWAR

For a band that hasn't released a new full-length since 2010, **Black Mountain** has crafted an unshakable aura of myth and mystery around its next move, which makes *IV* well worth the wait. As usual, the shadow-and-light vocal interplay between **Stephen McBean** and **Amber Webber** is the music's lifeblood, but what's clear from the hypnotic opening track, "Mothers of the Sun"—a roomy eight-and-a-half minutes of hard riffs, languid beats and stretched-out atmospherics—is how far the band has progressed beyond the stoner rock and tribal electro-boogie of 2005's self-titled debut. While the familiar '70s tropes of Zeppelin, Sabbath, Floyd and even Kraftwerk and Can still linger—right down to the Hipgnosis-style cover art, designed by keyboardist **Jeremy Schmidt**—the songs on *IV* stand on their own as part of a carefully thought-out whole. You can feel the work that went into the Bowie-ish "Cemetery Breeding" (which echoes the whistling synth melody of "Ashes to Ashes"), or the broodingly seductive "Defector," or the tightly wound punk workout "Florian Saucer Attack" (a prime vehicle for Webber, as is the wrenching folk dirge "Line Them All Up"). If "classic" rock is all about creating new worlds to get lost in, then this one qualifies.

Bill Murphy

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CYCLES • THE RUNNIKINE • MANTARAY

1 Hamish Anderson

"Trouble"
From the album *Trouble*
Self-released

Australia's Hamish Anderson was the last artist to tour with BB King. He's won Best Blues Song by the *Independent Music Awards* and was profiled in *Huffington Post* and *The Blues Magazine*. His debut album is produced by Jim Scott (Tom Petty, Wilco). It includes Johnny Radelat (Gary Clark Jr) and Aaron Sterling (John Mayer) and Chris Bruce (Seal).

www.hamishandersonmusic.com

2 Noah Lehrman

"Who Said?"
From the album *Wear This Crown*
Self-released

Drummer/percussionist and existential singer-songwriter Noah Lehrman has performed with moe.'s Vinnie Amico, late legend Babatunde Olatunji, members of The Deadbeats and Ominous Seapods in Gratefully Yours and Skeletons Keys, and various acoustic Phish and middle-eastern settings. Now Noah's original music project is hitting high gear with performances across America, Israel and in Amsterdam on 4/20! RODEO!

www.noahlehrman.com

3 Adeem

"Looking For A Window"
From the album *Move Toward LIfe*
Self-released

Adeem's 10 albums include *Made in New Hampshire*, an homage to his rapping roots, and *The Volume in the Ground*, an evolution beyond hip hop that's equal parts Robert Johnson and Tom Waits. The former Glue frontman calls *Move Toward Life* his strongest, most personal project to date.

www.adeemlife.com

4 APRIL

"Abandon"
From the EP *The Haunt*
Self-released

APRIL has been singing with the Long Island, N.Y.-based alt-rock band The Serotones since 2013. Now, she is finishing her first solo project *The Haunt*: an ambient, dark-pop EP driven by rock vocals and bold harmonies. "Abandon" is her unapologetic anthem to those who have tried to devalue her commitment to art.

www.soundcloud.com/iamaprilro

5 The Whiskey Treaty Roadshow

"Governor's Wife"
From the album *The Heart of the Run*
Self-released

Of brotherhood, music and fine spirits. The Whiskey Treaty Roadshow is a collaborative band that brings together five Massachusetts singer-songwriters in the vein of Americana, rock and roots-folk music. Founded in 2014, this young band exhilarates crowds across the Northeast and beyond. The Whiskey Treaty Roadshow is an acoustic spin-off of the wildly successful Whiskey Treaty Festival.

www.thewhiskeytreaty.com

6 SATE

"Know My Name"
From the album *RedBlack&Blue*
CLK Creative Works

SATE will satisfy your hunger for dirty rock n roll meets blues and soul. She is raw to the core and was built on the shoulders of giants like Tina Turner and Jimi Hendrix. Armed with ferocious soulful wails, relentless guitars, pulsating organs and greasy grooves to satisfy earholes.

www.stateofsate.com

7 Chris Bolint

"Escaping Shadows"
From the album *Embers Alive*
Self-released

"Escaping Shadows" is energetic searing instrumental rock at it's finest. This track, off of Chris Bolint's debut album, *Embers Alive*, is a USA Songwriting Competition Finalist. The Chicago-Area guitarist has garnered both regional and national praise for his debut album. Chris Bolint, *Embers Alive*, Instrumental Hard Rock.

www.chrisbolint.com

8 Roots of Creation

"Struggle" (feat. Melvin Seals & Ras MG)
From the album *Livin Free*
Bombshelter Records (ILS/ Caroline/Univresal)

Reggae/rock/dubtronica band Roots of Creation (RoC) is a festival staple (Gathering of the Vibes, Wakarusa, Closer to the Sun), internationally touring powerhouse and Top 20 artist on the Relix/Jamband radio chart. They've been awarded "Favorite Jam Band" by *Cider Magazine* and "Best Band in New Hampshire" by New England Music Awards. New album *Livin Free*, out April 22, features Melvin Seals (JGB), Ras MG (Sublime), Yeti Beats, Rubblebucket, Pato Banton and more.

www.rootsofcreation.com

9 Editor's Pick: Lake Street Dive

"I Don't Care About You"
From the album *Side Pony*
Nonesuch Records

Boston's Lake Street Dive are a fascinating blend of influences and complexity: jazz at heart, with an alternative D.I.Y. sensibility and a passion for classic rock and garage aesthetics. The band, comprised of singer Rachael Price, drummer Mike Calabrese, bassist Bridget Kearney, and trumpet-playing guitarist Mike "McDuck" Olson, first met and formed at Boston's New England Conservatory. The initial idea was to be a kind of free-jazz country band, playing country songs in an avant-garde style, but the group's natural pop instincts kicked in, and the final sound the band came up with was a bright, fresh, charming and exploratory version of jazzy pop/rock, full of hooks and plenty of R&B and soul flavors, with a big dose of the Beatles and British Invasion bands.

www.lakestreetdive.com

10 JamOFF! Winner: The Eiffels

"I'm Ready"
From the album *The Eiffels*
Self-released

The Eiffels' sleek, dance rock is contagious. *Yahoo! Music* raves, "Los Angeles buzz band, The Eiffels, has the music scene in a swirl with its catchy '80s synth-pop." *PureVolume* calls their songs, "shimmering electro-pop anthems." They're climbing the college radio charts and receiving support from major stations like LA's world famous KROQ.

www.theeiffels.com

Reviews

Marco Benevento

Bill Frisell
When You Wish Upon a Star OKEH

You can count on **Bill Frisell** never to repeat himself, but *When You Wish Upon a Star* shares something with its predecessor, *Guitar in the Space Age!* Like that 2014 gem, it's a nostalgic look back at the golden years: Where the previous set found the ever-innovative guitarist reimagining surf and folk-rock tunes from the '60s, the new album is Frisell's nod to his favorite movie and TV themes. This time, he casts a wider net. The title track, first heard in Disney's 1940 *Pinocchio*, is a long way chronologically from Nino Rota's theme from *The Godfather*, and Frisell treats them as the strange bedfellows they are: The former, wistful and whispering, is one of a handful of tunes sung by **Petra Haden** (daughter of late jazz great Charlie), while the latter is increasingly foreboding and imposing. Frisell loves his Westerns, and divvies Ennio Morricone's "Once Upon a Time in the West" into three sections, each with its own distinct personality. "Psycho," in two parts, is alternately crazed and creepy. Other highlights include Mancini/Mercer's ever-romantic "Moon River" and a perky "Bonanza." *When You Wish Upon a Star* is Frisell and band taking their raw materials and fashioning from them a thriller of their own. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Parquet Courts
Human Performance
ROUGH TRADE

Reaching from goofy indie scrappers to serious indie scrappers, **Parquet Courts** use the instantly appealing *Human Performance* to expand their laconic punk-plus-classic-rock shtick into a maturing songwriting direction. Threaded together by a charming post-Pavement insouciance, **Andrew Savage** and **Austin Brown**'s tunes can just as quickly turn guitar jammy ("One Man, No City"), go anthemic and add woodwinds ("Human Performance") or take a turn toward Elvis Costello-like truth attack love songs ("Berlin Got Blurry"). One of the few bands to seemingly borrow from '90s Beck ("Captive of the Sun"), Parquet Courts have veered from direction to direction, but *Human Performance* revels in finding a total picture of the quartet, turning out songs that feel effortless, until one arrives at "It's Gonna Happen," at the end of the album, a celestial slow dance whose glowing new possibilities might make one think twice about the tossed-offness of Brown and Savage's garage-fuzz wit. It's all fantastic fun, often with remarkably adaptable, hulking garage backbeat by **Max Savage**, and the kind of fun that doesn't fully come into bloom until some point later, when certain bits have stuck around and started to soundtrack real-life moments when music isn't playing. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Fruition
Labor of Love RANDM

The title track on *Labor of Love* comes from a time, two years ago, when Greensky Bluegrass' tour bus went bust. **Fruition** was opening for them at the time and quickly realized they could do little more than write a song about it. Fittingly, Greensky's **Anders Beck** throws his heart into his Dobro on the tune, which sets the album's tone: Fruition have grown into a rock band in recent years, albeit with string proclivities, pop ambitions and exceptional harmonies. Other songs continue the travelogue feel, including "Santa Fe," an easy dream of adobe streets, "Above the Line," for loved ones left at home, and "I Don't Mind," which gives itself completely to rock-and-roll. "Falling on My Face" wins best lyrics, but it's "The Meaning" that will be the crowd favorite. "The Way That I Do" is among three songs they've never performed live, and features a lo-fi intro—it was played through a '50s Zenith tube radio and recorded—that somehow emulates the wayfaring ways of its narrator. Also new: "Death Comes Knockin'," an *O Brother, Where Art Thou*-type tune that was recorded around one mic and features The Infamous Stringdusters' **Jeremy Garrett** on fiddle. It completes an already layered album—one that makes you feel both sad and exuberant, broken-down and found. ***Kiran Herbert***

Terrace Martin
Velvet Portraits
SOUNDS OF CRENSHAW/ROPEADOPE

It's been said by many, including those involved in its creation, that Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp A Butterfly* is a jazz record. There's a strong argument to be made for that if you consider the output of Lamar's *TPAB* collaborators following that landmark album's release. **Robert Glasper** and **Robert "Sput" Searight** had already established their footholds in the improvised tradition, but subsequent debut releases by **Kamasi Washington** and, now, **Terrace Martin** further reinforce that idea. Unlike Washington's *The Epic*, which is unquestionably a jazz album, *Velvet Portraits* almost serves as a missing link between *The Epic* and *TPAB*. Delving deeper into all extremes, from traditional R&B to G-funk, *Velvet Portraits* uses jazz sensibilities and instrumentation as launching points for an aural tour of South Central LA, past and present. Anchored by a band featuring Snarky Puppy drummer Sput on keys, making way for Martin's father, **Curly**—a veteran of the LA live jazz scene—to handle the drum duties, and rounded out by **Brandon Eugene Owens** on bass, Martin and his alto sax lead the quartet through a series of instrumentals, with guest spots for vocalists like **Lalah Hathaway**. The whole thing is flawless, which isn't surprising given that—in addition to his saxophone—Martin lent his production skills to no less than a third of *TPAB*, and to that end, no doubt, listeners will be anxious to hear the closing instrumental arrangement of Lamar's "Mortal Man." ***Wayan Zoey***

Soule Monde
Smashed World ROPEADOPE

When Hammond B3 funk-master **Ray Paczkowski** and soulful beat-keeper **Russ Lawton** aren't sharing the stage with Trey Anastasio as part of the Phish frontman's namesake solo outfit, the pair performs as **Soule Monde**. On *Smashed World*, their all-instrumental debut EP, the driving grooves that make the organist and drummer such indispensable forces in TAB—the former has been with Anastasio since 2001, the latter since the band's incubation in '98—charge right to the fore. The first number, "Influence," will have you bopping in your seat within seconds, as Paczkowski and Lawton lock in early and follow each other down several high-energy paths that end in an explosive keyboard-led peak around the 3:30 mark. No surprise here: The best track is a live one ("Allah Uya"), with eight-plus minutes of magical jamming delivered by two players who have been reaching new heights together for over a decade. The five songs and 32 minutes zoom by in a funky flash, and you'll be running to catch them on the road. This is jazz that knows how to boogie. ***Lilli Friedman***

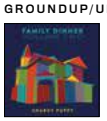
Skeletons
Am I Home? SHINKOYO

On *Am I Home?*, **Matt Mehlan**'s ninth album under the **Skeletons** banner, his project waves as wide and weird and ambitious as ever. Along with longtime musical captain **Jason McMahon**, *Am I Home?* finds Mehlan's songs arranged for a weirdo jazz orchestra. Over the eight and a half minutes of the opening "It's Infinite," mallet percussion and double drums and brass all swell and pan through the mix—sometimes live, sometimes in carefully painted bursts—below Mehlan's song, itself stretching from African grooves into outer space. Mehlan's language isn't cryptic so much as incredibly widescreen, and the narrator and production of "The City" sounds like a remarkable 21st meeting point of Paul Simon's *Graceland*, Talking Heads' (and Brian Eno's) *Remain in Light* and the undetermined avant-garde horizon. Not that Skeletons sound remotely like Vampire Weekend—Mehlan has his own lunatic program, spelled out over a decade of Skeletons albums. And, with a full complement of musicians, alongside studio whizbangery, *Am I Home?* is perhaps the clearest distillation of Skeletons' particular magic so far. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Marco Benevento
The Story of Fred Short
THE ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Marco Benevento is a child of the '80s, as he's increasingly demonstrated in his solo output. The FM synths and circuit-bent Reagan-era toys have long been ingredients in his sonic stew, but the increased use of processed vocals and piano and a Casio drum machine have pushed him further into new-wave territory. *The Story of Fred Short*, which ostensibly tells the tale of the Native American man who, once upon a time, partied on the land that Benevento's home and studio now occupy, may be the full realization of the 38 year old's childhood musical fantasies. Oozing with synth-pop harmonies, dreamy vocals and slivers of guitar perfection, courtesy of the similarly influenced **Brad Barr**, *Fred Short* is possibly the furthest thing from the Duo that Benevento has done with his breakthrough trio and, to that end, perhaps the best as well. Like a classic LP, Benevento presents the album as two distinct sides. The dance-ready Side A verges on party-rock and is highlighted by the bouncy, percussive "All The Other Dreams." But it's Side B, which contains the seven-part "Story," that represents what may be the keyboardist's finest compositional achievement thus far. ***Wayan Zoey***

Snarky Puppy
Family Dinner, Vol. 2
GROUNDUP/UNIVERSAL CLASSICS



For the second volume in their guest-singer-led *Family Dinner* series, **Snarky Puppy** picked New Orleans as the setting. The inescapable musical atmosphere clearly seeps into the recording—done as usual in front of a live "studio" audience—though not so much in the more obvious ways. (They do get their second line on with **Nigel Hall** on bonus track "Brother, I'm Hungry.") In addition to being the birthplace of jazz, which is ostensibly the root of what Snarky does, the Gulf port also served as the entryway for Afro-Cuban influence. As such, claves and Spanish language lyrics abound, mixed in with the soulful R&B that typified the previous edition of *Family Dinner*, and

Reviews

Vol. 2 features probably their highest-profile guest so far, **David Crosby**. The result makes for an inconsistent, though overall pleasing, mix of styles. While their previous album, the Grammy-winning *Sylva*, allowed for greater uniformity via the collaboration with Metropole Orkest, the guests here force the Texas-bred big band further out of their comfort zone, frequently to the benefit of the music. **Jeff Coffin** and **KNOWER** bring a playful energy to the funky "I Remember," and the band makes plenty of room for **Charlie Hunter** on the **Susana Baca**-led "Molino Molero." But it's the afore-mentioned Crosby feature, "Somebody Home," where the band shows an uncommon restraint that concludes the album-proper on a sensitive note. ***Wayan Zoey***

Field Music

Commontime MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

After flirting with the U.K.'s Mercury Prize on 2012's intriguingly off-kilter *Plumb*, brothers **Peter** and **David Brewis** have gone back to brass tacks. Although *Commontime* is rife, to be sure, with all the post-rock, art-pop twists and turns that have become signatures of any **Field Music** project since they first broke out of their Sunderland backwater in 2005, it's still primarily a straight verse-chorus album. Taken as a whole, it conjures a strange elixir of Talking Heads, Beach Boys, Hall & Oates, Brian Eno and Of Montreal—but those references are just jumping-off points. Both brothers are accomplished on multiple instruments, and their layered harmonies gel in a way that only siblings can master. They're also joined here by an ace band that includes Field Music vet **Andrew Moore** (keyboards) and new singer **Liz Corney** (who lends a soulful backing presence to the impossibly catchy "It's a Good Thing"). Whether it's the bass-in-your-face lope of "Don't You Want to Know What's Wrong?" or the bossa-like acoustic guitars that open "That's Close Enough for Now," the band tackles each song with raw, unbridled conviction and a bottomless wellspring of musical talent. And it all shakes out in the mix. ***Bill Murphy***

Glenn Jones

Fleeting THRILL JOCKEY

As a stubbornly curious guitarist, **Glenn Jones** has proved he can handle a wide range of approaches, whether it's John Fahey's American Primitive school, Leo Kottke's hyperdexterity or no-rules avant-rock. (For a real kick in the ass, get your hands on *Abhayamudra*, the live album Jones' band Cul de Sac made while backing ex-Can lead singer Damo Suzuki on tour in 2003.) *Fleeting* lives up to its title in every way; it's a quiet but haunting instrumental collection, recorded in a friend's living room by the Delaware River almost entirely on acoustic guitar (three songs are tracked on five-string banjo), that somehow captures the unbearable *brevity* of being. Part of that mood resides in Jones' otherworldly tunings—which he takes pains to reveal in the album notes, in case you're feeling brave—as well as the subtle touch he brings to near-dissonant passages that convey just as much emotion as a human voice singing the blues. The standouts are the cascading "Flower Turned Inside-Out" and the folk fable-ish "Portrait of Basho as a Young Dragon," but you owe it to yourself to experience the whole album in one sitting, preferably in a room warmed by the sun. ***Bill Murphy***

Josh Ritter

Sermon on the Rocks

PYTHEAS/THIRTY TIGERS

In live performance, **Josh Ritter** seems barely able to contain his enthusiasm. Consequently, it's somewhat strange that he chose to open his album on such an ominous note. A harsh, densely layered diatribe, "Birds of the Meadow" effectively belies the mostly upbeat tone Ritter does best. Fortunately, other than the melancholic and mournful "The Stone" and the darker designs found on "My Man on a Horse (Is Here)," a jubilant wallop is mostly maintained throughout. "Young Moses" dashes ahead at practically a gallop, a decidedly different pace from the laborious opener that preceded it. "Henrietta, Indiana" is equally effusive, its kinetic energy making it both compelling and convincing. Still, if one were pressed to name the most invigorating offering overall, that would have to be "Cumberland," a rousing and solidly sturdy slab of pure, unabashed exuberance, complete with handclaps and an irresistible enticement to sing along. "Homecoming" comes in narrowly behind, thanks in large part to a continuously thumping rhythm that builds steadily to an ultimate peak. Overall, Ritter's ability to engage his listeners is what makes his music sound so effortless and engthralling. It also happens to be the thing that makes this particular sermon so powerful. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Weezer

Weezer CRUSH/ATLANTIC

Weezer fans await each new album not with excitement but with pure anxiety. Will we get a cathartic nerd-rock masterpiece (1996's *Pinkerton*) or an over-processed clusterfuck with Lil Wayne collaborations (2009's *Raditude*)? Their career has been an ebb and flow between fist pump and facepalm, but **Rivers Cuomo** and company are in the thick of a reputation-saving hot streak: 2014's *Everything Will Be Alright in the End* found the quartet cranking the distortion and chasing classic pop songcraft; their 10th LP, forever to be known as "The White Album," is just as consistent but more varied. "L.A. Girlz" is a finger-snapping, "*Blue Album*"-styled power-pop waltz; "(Girl We Got A) Good Thing" morphs from falsetto-crooned folk-rock to chugging rocker, peaking with a harmonized electric guitar solo; epic closer "Endless Bummer" finds Cuomo cleverly equating romance to OCD over blistering metal-pop riffs. Most important, the cringe quotient has rarely been this low—even on the dorkiest tune, "Thank God for Girls," with its borderline-rap delivery and lyrics about God and Adam. "We got the wind in our sail, and we can do so many great

things together," Cuomo sings early on. He ain't kidding. ***Ryan Reed***

Britta Phillips

Luck or Magic DOUBLE FEATURE

Written and recorded over the course of several years, singer/bassist **Britta Phillips**' first solo venture is a remarkably spacious affair, far removed from the celestial trappings of her work with Luna. While her individual efforts have also included the duo Dean & Britta, with husband Dean Wareham, *Luck or Magic* gives Phillips ample opportunity to fully express her own interests. Consequently, songs such as "Million Dollar Doll," "Wrap Your Arms Around," "Drive" and "One Fine Summer Morning" are positively upbeat in execution, propelled by steady rhythms and Phillips' husky and assertive singing. While the contrast to her day job is profound, it's all the more surprising when you consider the fact that her original partner in the project, DJ **Scott Hardkiss**, died suddenly prior to its completion. Credit, then, producer **Eric Broucek** for stepping in and adding the oomph that allows these songs to soar. Comprising both original material and obscure covers, its dreamy designs find the tone and execution consistently in sync. "Fallin' in Love" would make an excellent single, its catchy refrain proving an instant inducement. Even the title track, which takes a more pensive pace, boasts its own sumptuous appeal. Be it luck or magic, Phillips' finesse is evident throughout. ***Lee Zimmerman***

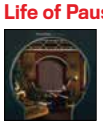
Jake Shimabukuro

Live in Japan HITCHHIKE/EONE

Over the past decade and a half, the Hawaiian-born **Jake Shimabukuro** has forevermore changed the world's perception of the ukulele—never again will it be considered a novelty or toy instrument. Although his virtuosity is now recognized worldwide, Shimabukuro has always been received most enthusiastically in Japan, so it makes good sense that he record his most recent live album there. The setlist is more recap than push forward, but it never gets old hearing what Shimabukuro does with Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" or George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," which closes out the show in a note-perfect, 10-minute rendition. Some of the not-so-high-profile tunes elicit as much awe, though: "Travels," the title track from the uke god's album released last year, is nearly orchestral in its breadth, while "Passport" incorporates fleet-fingered chord changes atop a choppy, hoppy groove. Pure delight. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Wild Nothing

Life of Pause CAPTURED TRACKS



Over the course of **Wild Nothing**'s precious releases, aspirations of becoming a dream-pop tunesmith have never seemed to be on **Jack Tatum**'s agenda. "Reichpop," the leadoff single from *Life of Pause*, confirms that notion at first, and not only with the glaring nod to minimalist composer (and godfather to a thousand indie bedroom producers) Steve Reich. With its bouncy, repetitive bassline and four-on-the-floor beat, the song harnesses a modern West African highlife feel—the drums and flowing marimbas, courtesy of Peter Bjorn and John's **John Ericsson**, and some sweet Swedish percussion certainly help hammer the point home—but the swirling atmospherics and Tatum's own echo-drenched vocals ("I am the silent son/I am the only one") help keep the "dream" alive. Later on, the rocked-out "Japanese Alice," as well as the exquisitely radio-ready title track, the trippy wall-of-piano and curvy saxophones of "Whenever I," and the motorized synth-and-drum thunder of "To Know You" all help make the case: This is indeed dream pop, but not quite in the shoegazey style of My Bloody Valentine or *Low*-era Bowie (both Tatum faves). Leaning a little more pop—and well-polished, at that—this is Tatum's most moving, and movable, work so far. ***Bill Murphy***

Hayes Carll

Lovers and Leavers

HWY 87/THIRTY TIGERS

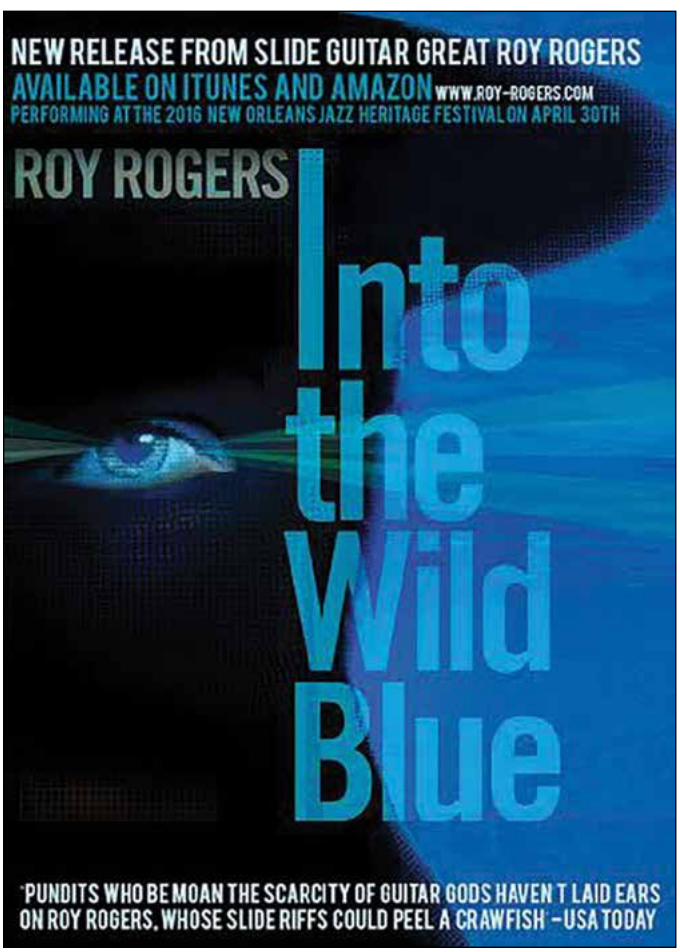
With his parched vocals and weary delivery, **Hayes Carll** doesn't exactly sound like a man whose list of accomplishments includes a recent Grammy nomination, chart triumphs and ongoing accolades from nearly every critic that counts. This latest album finds the sardonic Texas troubadour dryly circumspect and typically understated, even with **Joe Henry** directing from behind the boards. "I dreamed of something bigger, but it wasn't meant to be," he moans on the seemingly autobiographical "Sake of the Song," apparently implying that, in his view, real success remains beyond his grasp. That's clearly at odds with reality, but then again, with three songs mentioning the word love in their titles ("The Love That We Need," "Love Don't Let Me Down" and "Love Is So Easy"), Carll's deadpan demeanor might actually mask some eternal optimism. Ultimately, *Lovers and Leavers* affirms the fact that the afore-mentioned praise has been well founded. Carll's hard-bitten tales bring favorable comparisons to Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark and Kris Kristofferson, and, along with the grit in these grooves, a similar sort of wisdom prevails. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Daniel Hutchens

The Beautiful Vicious Cycle of Life

PRETTY MEAN

The ever-prolific **Daniel Hutchens** may be best known as the leader of the long-lived Bloodkin, but he's also contributed important songs to the catalog of fellow Athens, Ga., rockers Widespread Panic. On this, his third solo effort, he continues to deliver desolate, brooding comments on life's darker side, steeped in sin and soul. Aching pedal steel and spectral organ support Hutchens' tortured vocals on "American Country Ghosts," the story of a coke addict caring for his terminally ill mother. "Epitaph Town" is a funky rocker, driven by screaming, distorted guitars and a punishing backbeat. Here, he sings the praises of self-destruction with a tone balanced between regret and hollow laughter. Hutchens shows off his literary side on "Tearing Up the Tiles," a punchy, uptempo tune that references two short stories by Edgar Allen Poe before dropping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a snide reference to "The Raven" into the last verse. The bad news is delivered in a more straightforward manner on "All Golden Traces," a grim ballad supported by swells of distorted electric guitar noise and a moaning pedal steel. Hutchens walks a friend through the house he once shared with his lover, which finds him haunted by the memories that cling to everything around him. He sums up the sting of loss when he sighs, "It seems like the hardest thing is you remembering happy things." *J. Poet*

Sarah Neufeld

The Ridge PAPER BAG

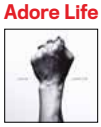
Colin Stetson

SORROW: Reimagining of Gorecki's 3rd Symphony 52HZ

Violinist **Sarah Neufeld** and saxophonist **Colin Stetson** first met in the mid-2000s, and the musical couple has collaborated extensively since, contributing to works by Arcade Fire and releasing the excellent *Never Were the Way She Was* in 2015. Together, they walk the margins between experimental composition and populist indie rock—Neufeld has worked with the chamber-pop combo Bell Orchestre; Stetson with Bon Iver, Tom Waits, Feist and more. Their individual 2016 releases, Neufeld's *The Ridge* and Stetson's *SORROW*, a reimagining of Polish composer Henryk Górecki's Symphony No. 3, illustrate their versatility, drawing from minimalist traditions, drone, post-rock, folk and shoegaze. Both are ambitious. The title track on Neufeld's release is more than eight minutes long, featuring sawing violin and airy vocals reminiscent of Julee Cruise. Stetson's take on Górecki's first movement, documenting the grief of the Virgin Mary, clocks in at nearly a half-hour, opening with sustained sax before expanding into blooming strings (Neufeld appears on the record) and a crashing, black metal crescendo. The records share sympathetic percussive approaches—Arcade Fire drummer **Jeremy Gara** adds driving rhythms to *The Ridge* and **Greg Fox** of Liturgy and Guardian Alien splashes blast beats on *Sorrow*. And while Neufeld's record feels more digestible in a pop context, her record is often as dark as Stetson's, employing grainy electric bass on the thrilling "We've Got a Lot," which echoes Stetson's use of subterranean synthesizers. But the duo knows the value of relief: Following an ornate intro, Stetson closes Górecki's third movement with a gentle pulse of reeds and strings. Neufeld closes with the radiating "Where the Light Comes In," its gorgeous fiddle work eventually giving way to foreboding keys. Neufeld and Stetson blend murkiness and shine, minimalist restraint and rock maximalism. *Jason Woodbury*

Savages

Adore Life MATADOR



Savages whip up a vicious post-punk ruckus on their second LP, *Adore Life*, but their secret weapon is silence. The London quartet maximizes tension in the space between every cymbal splash and bass throb, savoring each hint of reverb and blast of feedback. Take, for example, pseudo-title-track "Adore," a behemoth that veers from chaos to calm and back again: "Is it human to adore life?" frontwoman **Jehnny Beth** quietly croons in her unsettling French accent, a beacon of light through enveloping darkness. Minutes later, when she unleashes a deafening scream, the effect is hair-raising. Beth can't help but ooze charisma—at turns she's a brooding sage ("They will hurt you; they will break you down," she warns over the disco-punk groove of "Evil") and a vengeful lover ("If you don't love me, don't love anybody," she intones over the metal-punk melee of "The Answer"). All that upheaval can be exhausting—absorbing two or three Savages assaults could easily satisfy your cravings for the dark side. But its catharsis feels earned—*Adore Life* rewards every single sonic bruise and scrape. *Ryan Reed*

Falls

Omaha UNIVERSAL/VERVE

The debut full-length from **Falls** begins with "Let in the Light," a dream-pop number featuring just the female half of this Australian duo, **Melinda Kerwin**. The soundscape weaved through the combination of Kerwin's enthralling lilt with harp, violin and percussion is a lush delight, and is a sound unlike anything else found here. That's not to suggest that there isn't plenty to delve into and enjoy on the record, but Kerwin and her musical partner, **Simon Rudston-Brown**, choose to bounce around musical styles, rarely repeating themselves and making it nearly impossible to decide which genre you would lump *Omaha* into. The second track, "Summer," is another highlight, with both members singing a contagious chorus over a jangly piano-and-acoustic-guitar beat. ("Better Way to Go," with its harmonica interludes and the strongest lyrics on the album, is the other must-hear.) Though their romantic relationship ended, Kerwin and Rudston-Brown's musical chemistry is solid, and *Omaha* is an intriguing look at just a few of the directions that Falls could choose to venture into on their sophomore release. *Lilli Friedman*

Bob Mould

Patch the Sky MERGE

If *Black Sheets of Rain* was **Bob Mould**'s breakthrough as a trenchant songwriter with his finger on the pulse of emo (before it was called emo), then *Patch the Sky* is its older, wiser, thick-skinned but still-raging uncle. Locked in power-rock overdrive, Mould and his band (Superchunk bassist **Jason Narducy** and drummer **Jon Wurster**) feed a blast furnace of emotion—anger, regret, frustration, fear—that's cooled by philosophical notions of grace, self-discovery and acceptance. It's essentially of a piece with the entirety of Mould's work going back to Hüsker Dü, only with less bloodletting.

But again, that's not to say he comes across as tamed by age—not by any stretch. "Fragments of time/ Shadows and memories/ They can't be saved, I watch them floating out to sea," he laments on "Hold On," his voice fighting for air amidst a tidal wave of saw-toothed guitars. "Pray for Rain" pounds even harder, recalling Mould's punk roots and promising catharsis ("I need you, release me/ Make me feel again") through sheer volume. There aren't many quiet moments on *Patch the Sky*—the Joy Division-ish "Losing Sleep" is about as ambient as it gets—but when you have as much to get off your chest as Mould does, isn't it better just to shout it out loud? *Bill Murphy*

Grant-Lee Phillips

The Narrows YEP ROC

Grant-Lee Phillips has always toyed with Americana authenticity. His early band, the eponymous Grant Lee Buffalo, was a proponent of roots rock applied with a vengeance, an echo of post-punk insurgence. His Native American forebears on his mother's side famously walked the tragic Trail of Tears. Yet, he's never been fully embraced by the Americana community, partly because he never specifically aimed for inclusion, and partly because his solo albums have rarely fit into any specific niche. Consequently, it's notable that *The Narrows* finds him mining a decidedly down-home sound, one that establishes him as a heartland artist with a verifiable pedigree. While songs like "Tennessee Rain" and "Rolling Pin" convey a sturdy resolve and sense of urgency, the material is mostly mellower and more meditative overall, as typified by the reflective "Smoke and Sparks," the unpretentious "Moccasin Creek" and the weary, Band-like "Holy Irons." On the whole, it's Phillips' most exacting example of back-porch balladry since 2004's *Virginia Creeper* and decidedly one of his most affecting offerings as well. *Lee Zimmerman*

Thao & The Get Down Stay Down

A Man Alive RIBBON

Through four albums, **Thao Nguyen** has sung about life's stickier situations with emotional frankness that translated as pure likeability. But on *A Man Alive*, Thao lets her friend **Merrill Garbus**—of kinetic weirdos tUnE-yArDs—handle the production. The result takes Thao's familiarly warm songs and stretches them over knotty, beat-heavy guitar workouts. The album is wonderfully odd and playful, catchy yet complex, and very much alive. Whereas on "Meticulous Bird," her band **The Get Down Stay Down** would've once served up terse drumming and guitar, *A Man Alive* delivers snarling funk with a whole mélange of percussion and bass leading the way. "I got my baby to bed—oh, child, broke her to pieces instead," Thao crows with newfound swagger. Even amid the clatter, though, she never loses her ability to crush you. "Oh, Daddy, I broke in a million pieces, that makes you a millionaire," she coos on the hushed "Millionaire." The results are, indeed, rich. *Justin Jacobs*

Oneida

Positions ROCKET

Though clocking in at only 29 minutes, **Oneida**'s *Positions* is a fairly representative slice of what it's like to hear the veteran Brooklyn, N.Y., band live: two covers that might as well be the O's own and a nice drone out. The covers come from This Heat ("S.P.Q.R.") and Chrome ("All Data Lost"), and the requisite 16-minute jam sesh is on the latter—a sprawling side-long shape-shifter with the band spread out in the mix as if on some surrealistic stage set—**Kid Millions**' drums behind a luminescent keyboard gauze emitted by **Barry London**, before guitarists **Shahin Motia** and **Hanoi Jane** come a-tearing through the veil. The spare, original track "Under Whose Sword" sounds nothing like most of the band's live performance, except that it comes as a surprise, drone-tones and guitar rumination rising and sinking like the bay in autumn. The playlist party banger of the bunch is "S.P.Q.R.," though, a building chant with multiple levels of urgent historicity, vintage O ready to blow open your local head. *Jesse Jarnow*

OFF THE TRACKS

Roots of Creation

Livin Free BOMBSHELTER

Livin Free is the most ambitious project to date from New Hampshire reggae-rock outfit **Roots of Creation**. Appropriately riffing on their home state's motto, "Live Free or Die," the release comes as either an impressive 18-track album or an even more impressive three-album set that features the original studio recordings, plus acoustic and dub/remix versions of most of the tracks. Focusing on the songs themselves, the expansive collection offers up an array of both feel-good rhythms and rhymes, and socially conscious messages, with enough variety in the mix that even the extended tracklist doesn't get too stale. There's the "good times with friends" ethos of "Different," contrasted with the darker riffs and subject matter of "Uplift," with a healthy dose of R-rated love song with "Oh Lord," and even some not-so-chill vibes with "Punk RoC." Jerry Garcia Band keyboardist **Melvin Seals** adds his flavor to "Struggle," a introspective rumination on striving for success, and, elsewhere on the album, the RoC boys display a more direct connection to the Grateful Dead with their cover of "Row Jimmy," which translates the Dead sound surprisingly well to the slightly sped-up reggae template. *Matt Inman*

Moving Panoramas

One MODERN OUTSIDER

The women who comprise Austin's **Moving Panoramas** have logged time in some of the nation's best indie-rock bands. They take a low-key, almost ambient approach on their debut as a trio, with plenty of absorbing energy in their wide-open, spacey sound. The music is hypnotic—all tension and very little release—with cryptic lyrics that pull you into their surrealistic vortex. There's a Velvet/New Order feel to these gently unspooling visions that celebrate loneliness and desolation, and strike a perfect balance between hopelessness and cautious optimism. **Leslie Sisson**'s layered harmonies and bright, chiming guitar tones make "One" sound like a

celebration of solitude. Quiet electric guitars and murmuring voices introduce "Always," a desperate, lovely prayer to stay in bed forever with a potential lover. The heartbeat of **Rozie Castoe**'s bass adds tension to Sisson's chiming, slowly accelerating guitar. Drummer **Karen Skloss** produces a slow four-on-the-floor backbeat that makes "Magic" almost sound happy. Sisson's harmonies are bright and upbeat here, even though she admits she's longing for a magic that doesn't exist. *J. Poet*

Pure Bathing Culture

Pray for Rain PARTISAN

Pray for Rain, **Pure Bathing Culture**'s follow-up to their 2013 effort, *Moon Tides*, feels like a new direction for the Portland, Ore.-based indie pop band. It doesn't necessarily sound all that different, but the songs here are more laid-back, more open and seem to be interested in finding themselves along the way rather than following any sort of musical blueprint. That's not to say that any of the songs get lost or veer off course. The glimmering title track is burnished with a vintage, sepia-toned sheen—the sort of wistful song you'd listen to poolside in Palm Springs. "Darling, Save Us" has a similar throwback aesthetic—its instrumentation is sparse and gently gleaming as singer **Sarah Versprille** sweetly croons. The album has a softhearted tenderness to it, even when the lyrics take on edgier themes, and the duo always finds some beauty in their exploration of these melodies. If they occasionally sound tentative, then it's balanced by the cinematic delicacy of their playing. *Emily Zemler*

GospelbeacH

Pacific Surf Line ALIVE NATURALSOUND

GospelbeacH picks up the carefree musical innocence of 1972—at that unlikely junction where Laurel Canyon meets Haight-Ashbury. The album flows with a laid-back, sunny disposition, refreshed by the occasional downpour of distorted, psychedelic guitar interludes. "Southern Girl" rides a CSN&Y, floating, harmony-rich essence before a storm of guitars creates a sweeping, heavenly feeling. "Come Down" similarly starts with an easy folk-rock vibe before building into a sudden swirl of guitars and dense harmonies. It's a reoccurring theme on *Pacific Surf Line*, and unlike grunge acts—which perfected this quiet/loud dynamic—here, the loud isn't abrasive but adds a tasteful counterpoint to the quieter passages. Since GospelbeacH was formed by longtime Beachwood Sparks members **Brent Rademaker** and **Tom Sanford**—and features fellow Sparks alum **Neal Casal**, as well as **Jason Soda** and **Kip Boardman**—it's not surprising that this is such a cohesive set of songs. "Sunshine Skyway" would fit on any New Riders of the Purple Sage album, while "Your Freedom" channels The Flying Burrito Brothers. *Pacific Surf Line* would have been one of the best albums of the early 1970s. It works perfectly right now, too. *Glenn BurnSilver*

Soldiers of Fortune

Early Risers MEXICAN SUMMER

Soldiers of Fortune make some serious dude-rock. Emphasis on the dude. Emphasis on the rock, too, come to think of it. Sharing members with New York jam crew Endless Boogie, the all-star Soldiers—also featuring two members of Oneida and one **Matt Sweeney**—are, likewise, purveyors of boogie that could be endless. Channeling swagger into song form, blustering numbers like "Dog Tooth Down" are only a few beats away from sounding like Spinal Tap but, in many places, sound too genuinely chaotic to be dismissed as any kind of irony. In less than three minutes on "Pure Shame," the Soldiers swell from a gently insistent indie-rawk swirl to a tumbling throb (courtesy of drummer **Kid Millions**) and finally into the white, clear light of a psychedelic crescendo. **Stephen Malkmus** jams on "Campus Swagger," and other duders guest with the dude-fronted dudes elsewhere, and it's all pretty dude. *Jesse Jarnow*

Villagers

Where Have You Been All My Life? DOMINO

Albums may be an encapsulation of a musician's art, but no one says that the music's got to remain static. Dublin's **Conor O'Brien** has released three albums as **Villagers**, each an exercise in clear-eyed, diary-personal folk rock. Following 2015's pared-down *Darling Arithmetic*, O'Brien decided to revisit older songs on tour and strip them to their acoustic essence. On *Where Have You Been All My Life?*, O'Brien sets those reimagined versions to tape in a 12-song collection, all recorded live at London's RAK Studio one day last July, often in one take. The result is—for listeners—a beautifully hushed new album with a clear, raw sound. "Hot Scary Summer," with its promise, "I live inside you, and you live in me. Nothing's gonna change that, dear," is a gorgeous cut, but nearly identical to the *Arithmetic* original, whereas older songs, like "Set the Tigers Free," sound rejuvenated without any makeup on. Still, though *All My Life* is a lovely, engaging release, and a great intro to Villagers, it isn't required listening. *Justin Jacobs*

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Reviews

Six Organs of Admittance

Hexadic II DRAG CITY

The second release by **Six Organs of Admittance** in less than a year, *Hexadic II* is the acoustic companion to its prequel, both built around guitarist **Ben Chasny**'s self-made, card-shuffling compositional system. Unlike the first album, though, this information is almost totally irrelevant to the music itself—one of the dreamiest and most unified Six Organs projects in a good blink. Chasny lets the tones and their odd hexadically determined arrangements ring out undistorted, though, occasionally, accompanies them with harmonium and other well-placed drones. Combined with his hushed and self-harmonized vocals, the result is a space that's both cryptic and satisfying. Evocatively titled moaners like "Arm Their Rows," "Anyone's Dawn," and pretty much all the rest are the kind of genuinely esoteric mystic folk that record collectors used to drool over in catalogs of rare LPs, where the songs' self-generated mysteries remain more genuine than an already compelling concept. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Nicole Willis & The Soul Investigators

Happiness in Every Style

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC/TIMMION

Just when you thought the retro-soul revival of the last decade or so had reached max saturation, here comes New York-born singer **Nicole Willis** with her third LP fronting **The Soul Investigators**. The band's Chicago-style horns ("One in a Million") and Motown-flavored backbeats ("Paint Me in a Corner") sometimes come across as a bit *too* cleanly executed—Hey, the band is from Finland, alright?—but when Willis cuts loose, she cuts deep. She's no belter or shouter, or even all that technically gifted. Her secret boils down to one thing: What she lacks in range, she more than makes up for in style points and commitment, from the stirringly funky message of "Together We Climb" (propelled on bass and guitar with a crafty reworking of Eric Burdon's vocal line from The Animals' "We Gotta Get Out of This Place") to the misty ballad "Open Sky." *Happiness* lives up to the billing, and in an increasingly crowded soul resurgence, that's definitely saying something. ***Bill Murphy***

The Necks

Vertigo NORTHERN SPY

The quarter-century-old Australian post-jazz trio **The Necks** is all improvisation, no fat. The formula, such as it is, remains simple: one long, sublime jam per album, give or take a few exceptions, such as quadruple-CD sets. With a few dozen recordings since the trio's 1989 debut, it is hard to say for sure if *Vertigo* subverts any patterns, but it finds keyboardist **Chris Abrahams**, drummer **Tony Buck** and bassist **Lloyd Swanton** working toward different goals than the quiet, pretty, building-to-louder-pretty arcs that often seem to define Necks albums. Rather, *Vertigo* moves episodically, beginning with a pounding piano that opens into a shattered percussion rain and progresses through a series of instrumental spaces, a heady jazz thrill ride filled with cliffhangers and sudden glistening revelations. Both unpredictable and unstoppable, *Vertigo* is also far from unpleasant, a playful, musical Tilt-a-Whirl ready for an evening spin. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Willie Nile

World War Willie

RIVER HOUSE/VIRTUAL LABEL

The perennial journeyman rocker, **Willie Nile** writes songs that can be easily equated to the anthemic, unabashedly insurgent sounds of Bruce Springsteen, Graham Parker, The Clash, Garland Jeffreys and other artists able to invoke a crowd's frenzied allegiance. Coming of age on the mean streets of New York City, Nile has always shown a dedication to cause that's never faltered throughout his 35-year career. Indeed, any of his albums could be considered classics, even if evident to only a knowing few. That's reason enough why *World War Willie* ought to earn this tireless troubadour the respect he deserves. Recorded with longtime producer **Stewart Lerman** (Antony & The Johnsons, Loudon Wainwright III, Boardwalk Empire), it provides all the elements essential to Nile's sound—the driving delivery, the hook-laden refrains and the all-encompassing edge and urgency. Opening track "Forever Wild" would fit snuggly in the Springsteen songbook, while the rousing "Let's All Come Together," a clarion call to mend society's ills, would likely find Bono offering his approval. "Grandpa Rocks," a nod to his own elder status, does all that its title promises, while the appropriately homespun "When Levon Sings" salutes the late, legendary Band drummer. In that spirit, the set's final track, a blistering cover of "Sweet Jane," salutes another native New Yorker, Lou Reed, effectively asserting a revered lineage evident in all his efforts overall. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Baroness

Purple ABRAXAN HYMNS

For their follow-up to 2012's *Yellow & Green*, **Baroness** enlisted **Dave Fridmann**, a producer best known for his work with psychedelic-rock bands like The Flaming Lips. But it turns out that Fridmann is an apt choice for a stoner-metal band, as proven by the Georgia outfit's fourth album, which is also the group's first effort since their involvement in an injurious tour bus accident four years ago. Here, the musicians have channeled any angst or discontent into melodic, surging, heavy-rock numbers that feel positively upbeat—or as upbeat as metal can sound. "Shock Me" balances assertive, instrumental pummel with melodic vocal lines, a juxtaposition that has always been a signature feature of the band's music. Meanwhile, "Desperation Burns" is intense and immediate, reminding the listener of Baroness' boisterous live prowess. It's a well-made, thoughtful effort that lends evidence to the claim

Rogue Wave

that the best way to get over a hardship is to create something. *Emily Zemler*

Choir of Young Believers
Grasque GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

We begin mid-fantasy: **Jannis Noya Makrigiannis** stretches out his limber tenor in a wordless R&B vamp, backed by glossy synth pads and canned audience applause. "Olimpiyskiy" plays like a daydream of arena stardom for Makrigiannis, the Copenhagen singer/composer who's earned a cult following over the last decade with orchestral-rock act **Choir of Young Believers**. But that intro isn't a fluke but rather the first tease of a brave reinvention. *Grasque*, the third Choir LP, ditches strings and brass for warped electronica, New Romantic balladry and art-rock atmosphere. The album's first seeds were sown in late 2013, when Makrigiannis began experimenting on a pocket sampler—a Christmas gift from his mother. Building up over 10 hours of hooks and collages, he scaled back the material into *Grasque*, which weaves hip-hop programming ("Face Melting"), adult-contemporary grooves ("Jeg Ser Dig") and Roxy Music-styled saxophone ("The Whirlpool Enigma") into brooding soundcapes. It remains unclear whether Choir diehards will follow Makrigiannis down this rabbit hole detour. But his hypnotic about-face was worth the risk. *Ryan Reed*

TIGUE
Peaks NEW AMSTERDAM

A brilliant debut from the New York percussion ensemble **TIGUE**, the eight-track, 35-minute *Peaks* sounds less like the work of egghead new-music types than it does a cohesive album by a band. Produced by Oneida drummer **Kid Millions**, the album segues fluidly from piece to piece, building from compelling ensemble work ("Cranes") to a rich tapestry of vibraphone and gong, and guests that include Yo La Tengo's **Ira Kaplan** and **James McNew**, who contribute to the fuzzed atmosphere ("Mouth," "Dress Well"). Sometimes resembling the chiming and hypnotic post-rock of Tortoise, TIGUE aren't afraid to build less-than-cuddly tone poems into the middle of the album ("Drips," "Drones") but also happily turn out dramatic and swinging slow-rollers ("Cerulean"), and dexterous festival-ready showcases (the full-circle closer "Ripped"). An eclectic debut from what could be dismissed as a niche act, TIGUE's *Peaks* announces the arrival of a heady new act to watch out for. *Jesse Jarnow*

Rogue Wave
Delusions of Grand Fur

EASY SOUND

Rogue Wave have evolved from indie-pop underdogs (2003's *Out of the Shadow*) to epic-scale rockers approaching U2 grandiosity (2007's *Asleep at Heaven's Gate*) to confused craftsmen straining for synth-pop relevancy (2010's *Permalight*). But singer-songwriter **Zach Rogue** and drummer/producer **Pat Spurgeon** regained a sturdy foothold with *Nightingale Floors*, a set of raw confessional tunes that rebuilt their reputation from the rubble, stripping away the awkward sheen of their previous LP. Now, three years later, they've maintained the classic, melodic spark that defined Rogue Wave's early songs while probing into spacey new territory: While "Falling" defines the project at its core (just Rogue's soft croon and acoustic guitar, with recording hiss nearly as prominent as the Wurlitzer), "What Is Left to Solve" burrows into an icy synth-rock groove and "Frozen Lake" thaws out shoegaze guitar tones. *Delusions of Grand Fur* doesn't boast a timeless indie classic—no "Lake Michigan," no "Bird on a Wire." More important, it finds the band charting their DNA and gracefully, subtly tweaking the code. *Ryan Reed*

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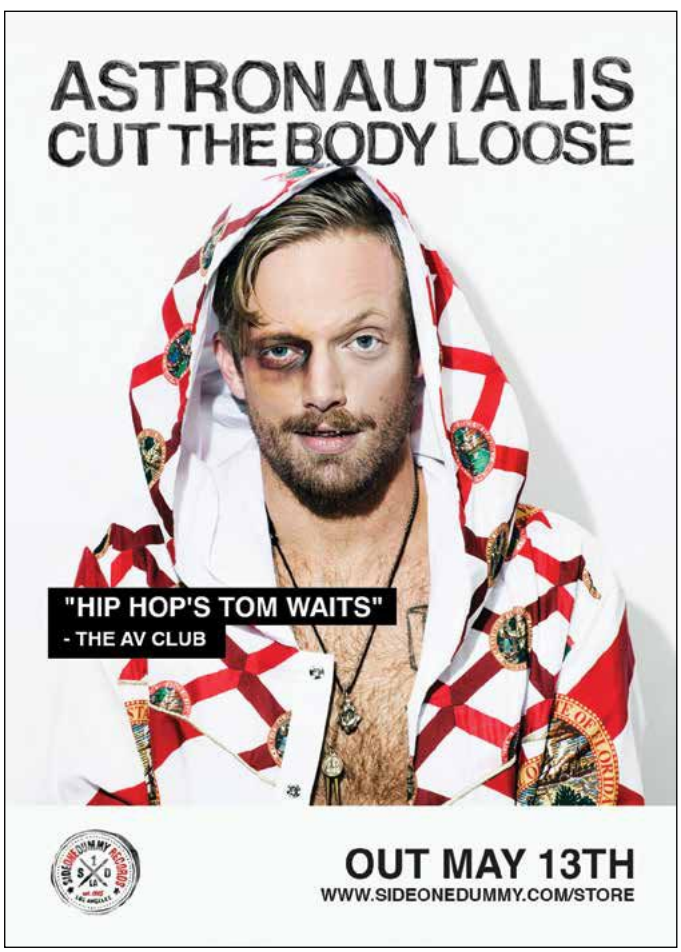


Plundering The Vaults

Jeff Buckley

You and I COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Nearly two decades after he tragically drowned in the Mississippi River, **Jeff Buckley**'s legacy is very much alive. The fact that he released only one proper studio album, 1994's *Grace*, and that the album is a singer-songwriter classic doesn't hurt. But there's a sense of unfinished business that keeps his memory afloat—that heartbreaking voice, the bank of unreleased demos and covers, and the uncertain circumstances surrounding his death. There hasn't been a shortage of music for Buckley fans to sift through, most notably *Sketches for My Sweetheart the Drunk*, the 1998 demo collection that would've become his second album. But few have felt quite like *You and I*. The 10-track release features eight covers and two originals, all taken from his first Columbia Records sessions in 1993. The feeling is intense—slip on some headphones, and it's just you, that trembling voice and a guitar. Buckley's take on Dylan's "Just Like a Woman" is gorgeous and tender; his pair of Smiths covers will wreck you. But we also get some funkier cuts: Sly & The Family Stone's "Everyday People" and Led Zeppelin's "Night Flight" have loose, gritty, street-busker feels. The album's namesake comes from "Dream of You and I," in which we hear Buckley describe a dream ("I was in an auditorium at a college, and everyone was congregated and singing the same words") from which *My Sweetheart*'s "You and I" was born. *You and I* isn't required listening, but for fans, it's a captivating, personal look at an artist singing for no one but himself. ***Justin Jacobs***

Cass McCombs

A Folk Set Apart: Rarities, B-Sides & Space Junk, Etc. DOMINO

It's not easy to get inside the mind of **Cass McCombs**, primarily because he seems to revel in his misanthropy as a perennial alt-folk outsider. But that's exactly the hook that draws you in; he finds a vast wellspring of humor in his chosen path, which might explain why he has collaborated with so many people over the years and, in the end, why *A Folk Set Apart* became such a necessity. Comprised largely of songs from limited edition, split 7-inch releases, with everyone from the **Meat Puppets** to **White Magic**, and featuring guest appearances from Phish's **Mike Gordon**, Deerhoof's **Chris Cohen** and more, it's an exceedingly quirky collection, and somehow opens more doors to McCombs' undeniable talent as a singer-songwriter than anything he's released previously. At one end, there's the sunny, Chris Stamey-ish mood of the oddly catchy "Evangeline" and the riveting narrative of "Bradley Manning;" at the other, the bent avant-garde leanings of "Texas" (with Gordon on vocals) and the ghostly blues of "The State Will Take Care of Me." Whatever your left-field tastes are in indie music, you'll find them waiting patiently for you here. ***Bill Murphy***

Jeff Buckley

Grateful Dead

Dave's Picks Vol. 17: Selland Arena, Fresno, CA 7/19/74 RHINO

In **Grateful Dead** lore, 1974 was the year when it all got too big—for the first time. Over the several preceding years, the band had gone from best-kept secret in rock to hottest ticket in town. Now they were carting around their infamous "Wall of Sound," a humongous concert audio system unlike any that had ever been built—it required its own fleet of trucks. They had their own record company and all of the attendant worries that come with running a business. By the end of the year, the Dead, exhausted, had decided to pack it in, at least temporarily, filmed a run of shows at Winterland and took a hiatus (which, of course, didn't last very long) as the musicians went off to explore solo endeavors.

Far from a band that had run out of ideas or invention, though, GD '74 produced some keeper shows. Granted, the Dead had ritualized several aspects of their presentation by this point, but their playing (trimmed down to the basics following Pigpen's death the previous year and with drummer Mickey Hart still MIA) was, for the most part, tight and inspired.

Fresno is a little slow-going on the uptake—first-set tunes like "Bertha" and "Beat It on Down the Line" are fairly ragged, but by "Scarlet Begonias" and "Playing in the Band," they'd found their groove and transcended the mundane. The intermission entertainment, 15 minutes of **Phil Lesh** and **Ned Lagin**'s experimental electronic "Seastones" music, intrigued some and likely sent many others scurrying to the beer counter, but as the show progressed through flawless workups of "He's Gone"> "U.S. Blues" and a thrilling "Weather Report Suite"> "Jam"> "Eyes of the World"> "China Doll" climax—the pre-"Space" jam segment getting mighty freaky—there was no doubt that the Grateful Dead still had plenty to say. It would just have to wait a while. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Janis Joplin

Little Girl Blue: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Janis Joplin's entire official recording career fits into a four-year span, 1966-70, and at this point in time, it would be unreasonable to expect to hear anything of value that hasn't surfaced previously. With that in mind, the compilers of *Little Girl Blue*, the soundtrack to the recently released, same-named documentary, have done their best to keep the companion audio release at least interesting. Several of the 17 tracks come from the albums Joplin recorded with **Big Brother & The Holding Company** and on her own; the rest are oddities, with no major surprises but enough to entice the completist. Among the latter are an early, pre-rock, acoustic take of "Careless Love," the consummate "Ball and Chain" from the Monterey Pop Festival, and various other live performances from the fabled trans-Canadian Festival Express tour, Woodstock, Germany and Detroit. The only real find of note is an incendiary "Piece of My Heart," recorded in New York in April 1968, following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King. Audio quality throughout the set varies, but overall, it's all quite listenable and presents a fair cross-section of Joplin's output. It shouldn't be the first Janis that a neophyte hears, but longtime fans will find much to savor. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Professor Longhair

Live in Chicago ORLEANS

Only a decade before he played this gig in Chicago in 1976, **Professor Longhair** was what might be called—there's no polite way to say it—a has-been. Although his piano style had influenced so many in New Orleans and beyond, from Allen Toussaint to Dr. John, work within the music industry had dried up for the man born Roy Byrd. He'd cut a number of influential tracks between the late '40s and the mid-'60s, then slipped under the radar, toiling as a janitor to make ends meet until being rediscovered at the start of the following decade. Only then did Professor Longhair begin to receive the recognition he'd earned, recording his first proper album in 1979, before dying the following year. The eight tracks gathered up on this previously unreleased collection from the Chicago Folk Festival are consistent with other live Longhair performances that have surfaced over the years—backed by a sympathetic quartet, the chops were still in place as he delivered signature tunes like "Big Chief" and "Mardi Gras in New Orleans." Perhaps the finale, a hard-rocking "Fess's Boogie" spotlighting guitarist and album co-producer **Billy Gregory**, offers a hint as to where the Prof might've gone, but we'll just have to be thankful we have what we have. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

down to Nassau, Bahamas and rented Steve Marriott's cottage on the beach because Humble Pie had all bought little cottages down there. I went down for three weeks—that's all the time I had to write the whole *Frampton* album.

When I first arrived, I partied a little too hard with Alvin Lee of Ten Years After, who was also there on the island. Rest in peace, Alvin—he was a great, great friend and lovely guy. I didn't get a lot done the first two weeks but, when he finally left the island, I got down to some work. The first day of the last week I was down there, I got up and wrote "Show Me the Way" before lunch. I thought, "This is the first thing that I have written that I would play for Mom." All the other stuff I [had] been writing was not up to par. So I took a little break, went for a ride around the island, had a little swim, had lunch and came back. Then I thought, "Maybe this is a good day," so I started on what ended up being "Baby, I Love Your Way." I remember going outside just as the sun was setting, sitting by the beach and writing the lyrics to the first verse and chorus. It was a special day.

The way I decided to do "Show Me the Way" on the new album was with a subdued talk box. It's the only gadget on *Acoustic Classics* because people are so used to hearing that sound. When I'm on a radio show or doing something like that and there's no audience, I will do it just by playing that melody on the guitar. I do it a third way live, by having the audience sing the talk box part. I tell them: "It's slightly humiliating, but you'll enjoy it once you've done it." I discussed heavily and forcefully with myself whether I should put the talk box on the album. It's a much cleaner sound. I think it's a very attractive sound; it's different.

LINES ON MY FACE

"Lines on My Face" is obviously a breakup song—the relationship is finishing or has finished. When that period happened, my first marriage was on the rocks. I came out and stayed with friends in New York. I stayed with my manager for a while. I stayed with my dear friend Frank Carillo, and the two of us played acoustic on the version of "Lines on My Face" that's on *Frampton's Camel*.

I had come up with the chords and the melody that I wanted for "Lines on My Face" in Manhattan. Then I went out for the weekend to see Frank on Long Island. I remember sitting in his brother Andrew's bedroom (who also is a friend of mine). Andrew's mother had thrown him out of his bedroom because I was coming over, so Andrew had to sleep on the couch—the little things. Anyway, I wrote the lyrics over the weekend and played them the song—hopefully, they like the performance on this new project.

SAIL AWAY

"Sail Away" was a song that we did for *Somethin's Happening*. We recorded at the place Led Zeppelin did *Houses of the Holy* [Headley Grange]. It's a huge mansion. It's where they cut "When the Levee Breaks [from *Led Zeppelin IV*]"—that huge drum sound. We were all in different rooms. The drums were in the kitchen, I was in the bathroom upstairs and the bass was in the living room. Each room sounded best for that particular instrument for that track. The acoustic sounded so full in that echoey sound of a bathroom.

It's always been a song that I like because it's a sing-along. It hasn't gotten a lot of attention over the last decade and I thought, "I've always enjoyed it," so I thought I'd bring that one out. It's the only one on the new album that has more than one vocal from me. I decided that I needed to do the background vocals because they were such a big part of the song.

ALL DOWN TO ME

This is one of those songs I came up with relatively quickly, as I do with the ones I end up liking the most. It's the realization that we all have our weak periods, where things seem to get on top of us. When it comes down to it, people can give you advice, but you have to make the decision of what is best for you. What's best for somebody else isn't necessarily the same. It's all down to you working it out.

PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

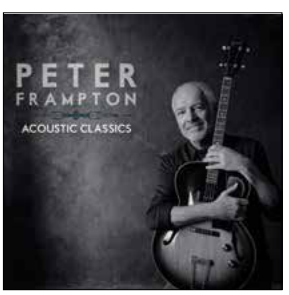
It's very short and it probably goes down as well as "Do You Feel" when I do it live. It's one of those little cheeky numbers that was an afterthought for the *Frampton* album. The juxtaposition of that fading out and leading into "Money" was a 180-degree switch, so I love the placement there. When I just do "Penny for Your Thoughts" and no other acoustics in the electric act, we usually stick it right before "Money."

It was something that I was messing around with and developed over a few months. I played it for Chris Kimsey, and he said, "We've got room—that's good, man—let's record that quickly." We'd already mixed everything for *Frampton*. He said, "We could stick it in there, what do you think?" So I said, "Let's do it." It was just by chance that it ended up being on the *Frampton* album, then ended up on *Frampton Comes Alive*.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE I DO

This was the one that I originally thought was definitely off the table for an acoustic album—"How the hell can we do it? It's such an improvised number and every instrument is so important."

The chorus was originally written on an acoustic, but then I took the chorus to a rehearsal for the first Peter Frampton tour of America with my band Frampton's Camel. We were jamming and I brought my reel-to-reel, and we were recording all the jams if we came up with something. The verses and the instrumental portion were written on electric with the band, and I brought the chorus that I had written on acoustic. That was the only part that I thought could be done acoustically.



As we were recording this album, I began to think, "There's the challenge. Let me try it." I went to the *Frampton's Camel* version—the real slow version—and I dissected what was going on there between the Wurlitzer and my electric guitar in the instrumental intro, and decided that I would do it on two guitars. I started to smile when I came in and listened to it. I just tried the intro to see if it would work, and then put on the second harmony guitar, and it did.

I decided that was the only one that would benefit from an acoustic bass. We already had two guitars. Leave me in the studio long enough, and there would be an orchestra on there, but I did stop myself. I think it's the only one with the bass on there, but it really works and makes it feasible to do that number acoustically. I think it came off really well.

I'M IN YOU

This was the very first song I had written in between touring in '76, while supporting *Comes Alive*. I wrote it in one night. I started it early in the evening and, by the time the sun came up, not only had I written the music and the words, but I also recorded the piano and the vocal at home. That is the original piano and vocal that is on the "I'm in You" studio record. I did it on a Revox reel-to-reel that Jerry Shirley, the drummer of Humble Pie, lent me. I took it into the studio and we overdubbed onto the original.

I did my version of it today in the same manner. Obviously, performances are always going to be different—take one to take two could be a 180-degree difference. That's what performing is all about; it's always different. I did "I'm in You" maybe five different times over a couple of months, and this is the one I chose because I felt this performance was most communicative and personal.

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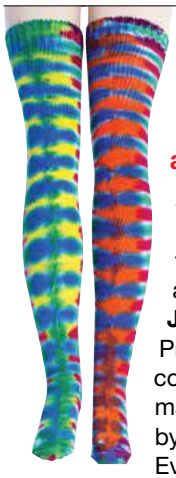

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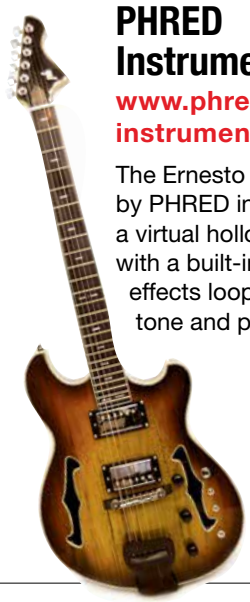

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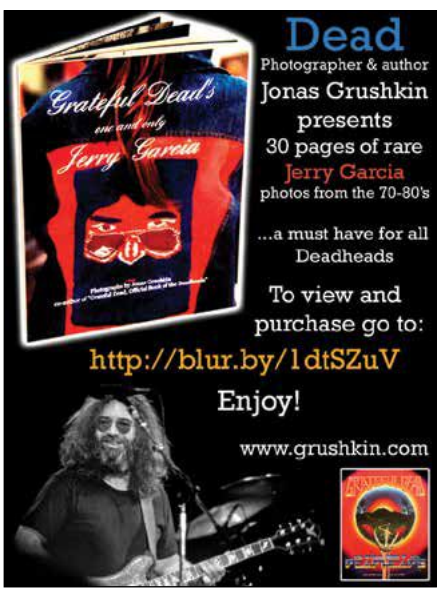

Confessions of a Springsteen Newbie

Sportswriter Matt Norlander shared an account of his first Bruce Springsteen show in an exclusive online essay. Here's how it begins. To read the rest, visit Relix.com.

Until a couple of weeks back, I'd never been to a Bruce Springsteen concert. I'm merely an informal fan. Yes, we do exist: 34 years old, Caucasian—and only a casual supporter of The Boss. I own used copies of *Born to Run* and *Darkness on the Edge of Town* on vinyl, have three other Bruce records on my iPod and it pretty much ends there.

Anyway, after I clear the security line for the Feb. 10 show in Hartford, Conn., the first person I see is (shockingly) a middle-aged white sportswriter, who I happen to know but was not aware would be at the concert. It could not have been a more cliché, nor a more appropriate, coincidental introduction to my first Springsteen experience. There's a long-running meme in American sports media about how every white, male sportswriter between the ages of 30 and 60 is a die-hard Bruce fan. Like any good joke, it's based in a lot of truth. This man, an affable reporter and dutiful writer, asks me if I had listened "to the tape from Albany" from a couple of nights before, or if I'd seen this other Springsteen superfan (also another sportswriter!) who was at the show that night—some guy who has logged more than 200 Bruce shows.

Sorry, man. I'm just here to catch the show and see if it can possibly live up to the decades-in-the-making hype. My concert-going résumé was incomplete without being exposed to—as reputation would have it—one of the most powerful live-music experiences in American culture. That rep is well-earned. Bruce and his E Street Band are closing in on 40 years of gigs, and in that time, they've assembled a musical militia to push the cause. That's the thing about Bruce fans: They're just as fevered and prideful of their concert stats and ticket stubs as honks for Phish, the Dead and Dave Matthews Band. The difference with Bruce advocates pretty much comes down to an affinity for leather jackets and an overcompensating pride rooted in their New Jersey affiliations. They've never been burdened with a stigma because the core of the fan base has always been steeped in upright citizenship and lunch-pail ethos.

Yet there is still a distinct sense of communal elitism among his graying devotees. Springsteen has managed to become one of the greatest American rockers ever, yet still has an insider-appeal to his music. There's a sheen between Bruce's greater public image within American culture versus what it actually means to follow the man, adore the band and continually identify with the four or five motifs he's pushed from his gut—and sung from his throat—about since 1970.

The Boss does bring in a varied crowd. He is ageist-proof. I brought a buddy with me to the show—who was absolutely not a Bruce fan at the start but was evangelized by the time we walked out—and we were squeezed 50 rows up between a pair of coeds who sang every word, and this married septuagenarian couple. The man claimed to have been a roadie on Bruce's crew in the '80s. He tells me there were about 300 people on the payroll during the tour behind *Born in the U.S.A.* and he can no longer fully bend his left knee.

The Most Popular Relix.com Features

If you're curious about which of our articles have captured other folks' fancy, then you can always check out the "Most Popular" section of Relix.com. With that in mind, even though we're a few months into 2016, here's a look at the 20 most popular online articles of 2015. We have links to all of them at relix.com/top20articles.

1. Trey Anastasio: Lessons from Dead Camp
2. Jason Isbell: A Hard-Wrought Freedom
3. How the Warlocks Passed the Acid Tests
4. The Other Side: Brent Mydland's Unreleased Solo Album
5. Tame Impala's Eclectic 'Currents'
6. The Core: Dead & Company
7. My Morning Jacket: Only Memories Remain
8. The 'Midnight' Ride of Grace Potter
9. A Conversation with Mickey Hart and Lee Ranaldo
10. Track By Track: Warren Haynes' *Ashes & Dust* featuring Railroad Earth
11. The Many Sides of Courtney Barnett
12. Neal Casal: Hallucinating a Solution for Fare Thee Well
13. John McLaughlin on Miles Davis, Mahavishnu and More
14. Bill Walton: We Are Here, We Were There, We Are Everywhere
15. Reel Time: Inside The National's Ambitious Grateful Dead Tribute Album
16. Alabama Shakes: The Power of Place
17. Blind Melon's Shannon Hoon Remembered
18. Harris Wittels: The *Parks and Recreation* Writer Gets to 'Analyze Phish'
19. Gary Clark Jr.: Searching for Sonny Boy Slim
20. Parting Shots: Reggie Watts

Jambands.com Radio Chart

FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY

1. Tedeschi Trucks Band *Let Me Get By*
2. Yonder Mountain String Band *Black Sheep*
3. Circles Around The Sun *Interludes for the Dead*
4. Lettuce *Crush*
5. Luther Dickinson *Blues & Ballads*
6. Polyrhythmics *Octagon*
7. David Gans *It's a Hand-Me-Down*
8. Swamp Cabbage *Jive*
9. Cicada Rhythm *Cicada Rhythm*
10. Coral Creek *Coral Creek*
11. Larry Keel *Experienced*
12. Great Caesar's Ghost *Live at The Stephen Talkhouse*
13. Greg Merritt Jazz Quartet *New York Sexy*
14. King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard *Paper Mâché Dream Balloon*
15. David Bowie *Blackstar*
16. Craig Greenberg *The Grand Loss & Legacy*
17. The Black Lillies *Hard to Please*
18. Jim Lauderdale *Soul Searching*
19. SIMO *Let Love Show the Way*
20. Stick Figure *Set in Stone*
21. Protoje *Ancient Future*
22. Shinyribs *Okra Candy*
23. Ghost-Note *Fortified*
24. Fresh Cut Orchestra *From the Vine*
25. Jeremiah Tall *Waking*
26. Lew Tabackin Trio *Soundscapes*
27. Freekbass *Cincinnati*
28. Shaman Juan *Blabbermouth*
29. The Marcus King Band *Soul Insight*
30. Professor Louie & The Crowmatix *Music from Hurley Mountain*

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Marc Millman

Dead discography appeared in the seventh issue of *Dead Relix* in late 1975, taking up three pages. Slabicky kept at it, adding more data and information, before going online in 1986, hopping on the Usenet and making contact with some *serious* Deadologists. His file made the leap from typewriter to text, and he has never upgraded to HTML, preferring the easy workflow. A Google search for "Ihor Dead discography" finds a file that's nearly 200,000 words, approaching 600 pages if printed. That particular volume is a modest work in the unpublished Dead bibliography. A half-decade ago, Corry Arnold estimated his output at the equivalent of over 1,800 pages and then stopped counting. Caleb Kennedy guesses his at somewhere over 1,000.

Not all Deadologists work online, for that matter. In Germany, a Dead freak (who saw the band with their legendary Wall of Sound speaker array in Munich in '74) and longtime taper named Uli Teute has been collaborating with Volkmar Rupp on a massive Grateful Dead photo archive. "As of 2016, end of February, we are at about 8,800 pics," Teute says, turning the old-time Deadhead sport of identifying photos into a semi-private catalog organized by date. "We have no copyrights to any of the pictures," says Uli. "Some well-known photographers—or a legal representative of a photographer or [their estate]—sell their pictures on the Web. We do not want to take away from their earnings. Still, we will show pictures from the archive collection to prove facts otherwise unknown, in a sense used as a scientific source." Someday, one hopes, they will cross-reference them by gear, facial hair, wardrobe and more. It has been said that if one is working on a project and the relevant photos exist, then one might wake up to discover an attachment-laden email from benevolent German Dead freaks.

ONE DEAD SCHOLAR I WAS ESPECIALLY SAD to miss at Albuquerque this year was Joe Jupille, who couldn't make it down from Colorado. Joe is not an independent scholar in the literal sense of many of his colleague Deadologists. He holds a Ph.D in political science, a professorship at the University of Colorado Boulder, and is an associate at the Institute of Behavioral Science. Jupille's perfectly titled Jerry Garcia's Middle Finger blog is a smartly written journal of his expeditions into what he has dubbed the *Garciaverse*. Some of his particular interests include Garcia's finances, his relationship with the Hells Angels, warmly annotated listens to all eras of the Jerry Garcia Band, bibliographies and generally anything Garcia-related that *doesn't* have to do with the Grateful Dead. Jerry's just where it's at for Joe Jupille.

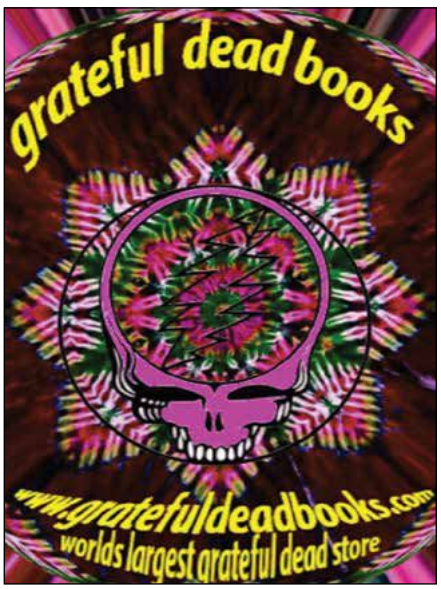
At Albuquerque conferences in the past, Jupille has shown his in-progress visual representations of various dimensions of the vast Garciaverse, demonstrating the guitarist's social connections to other musicians in relationship to his repertoire and other factors. He is still working on its best possible form.

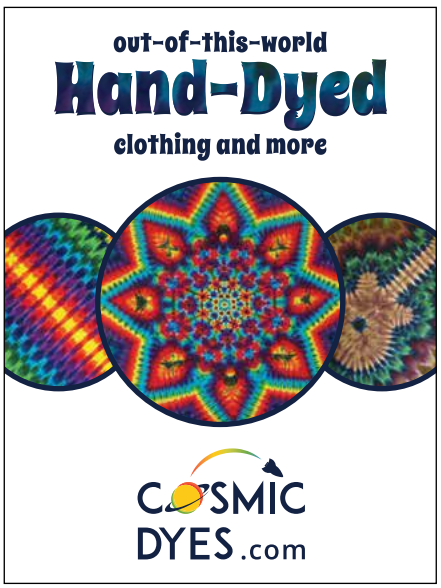
In naming his work the Garciaverse, Jupille has nailed a distinct aspect of what it is the Deadologists achieve, on a level perhaps more conscious than their historical work: more episodes in the imaginary unscripted reality show of the Grateful Dead. Take Jupille's post about the band's canceled July 4, 1974 show in Oshkosh, Wisc., and cross it with details from Ihor Slabicky's NedBase, where one discovers an account of members of the Dead drag-racing rental cars through rural Wisconsin in the summer of '74. (The latter site, of course, is a chronology of *Seastones* composer and frequent early '70s Dead guest Ned Lagin.) With the right amount of Grateful Dead reading, if one desired, all they'd have to do is sit back and let an episode write itself, imagining what the Grateful Dead might be talking about while out on the Wisconsin backroads over Independence Day weekend 1974, at the peak of Watergate, at the height of the band's first stadium period.

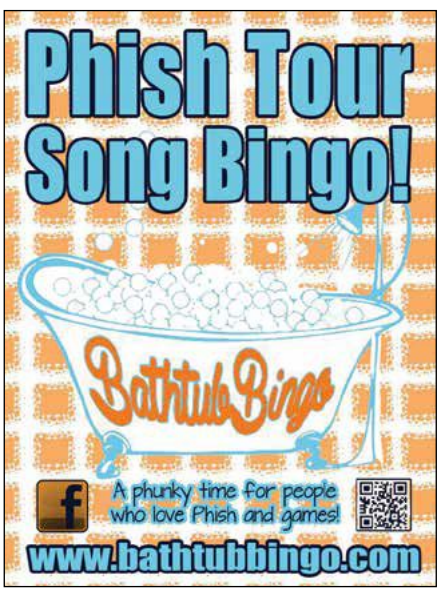
The expanded universe reality-show aspect comes to the fore most vividly via the freeform Grateful Dead ahistorical blog known as Thoughts on the Dead.

"Some of it's absolutely magnificent work," says Dead archivist Nicholas Meriwether of TotD's fact-laden kin. "Corry Arnold's stuff is just amazing in every way, an awful lot of it is stunning. I do think that, often, what is missing from the work that's been done outside of an academic context... just a little bit of input from the academic side could make it even more useful, even stronger." But Grateful Dead Essays has begun incorporating footnotes into posts. The latest, "The Songs the Warlocks Played," runs to 59 items.

Various cornerstone texts of Deadology are available used online, in prices ranging from $5 for *The Grateful Dead Reader* to a hefty $30 for the substantial *The Grateful Dead and the Deadheads: An Annotated Bibliography*. There are also exciting new titles connected to the Grateful Dead phenomena, psychedelics, technology and counter-culture that you can read, too, on sale at bookstores now.







"If somebody thought we were 'Americana' and saw us live, they'd be like, 'Holy shit. This is loud!" adds King. The simple fact that their individual vocals weren't wildly dissimilar helped the budding group cohere in concert, as well as in the studio. Unlike so many harmony bands, where the singers vary greatly in pitch and texture, there's no high-range or low-bass singer in the Feathers. Likewise, no one has a lot of gravel in his voice. The result distinguishes the band from the high-contrast vocal braids of Fleetwood Mac and Gomez. "If you listen to the Eagles, Don Henley and Glenn Frey sound like fucking opposites," King says. "But then there's that cool thing with The Band where, a lot of times, I can't tell if it's Rick Danko or Richard Manuel that's singing."

To further blur their voices, the Feathers mix them up fitfully. In certain songs, they'll switch between three lead singers in a single verse. Combined with their mind-melding songwriting, the Feathers are more like a well-blended melting pot than a '60s-rock-style salad bowl, where each ingredient retains its own flavor and texture.

DESPITE THE FEATHERS' SYMPATICO, THEIR first album featured four tracks with individual songwriting credits. *Lonely Is a Lifetime* only boasts two. "We're definitely getting more cohesive," Burns says. They credit their relentless time on the road for tightening their bond. From 2012 to 2014, they toured nearly nonstop, opening for acts like Bob Dylan, Paul Simon and Willie Nelson. "In 2013, we did as much as a band can do without dying," he adds. "The only interaction we had was with each other.

Their isolation from the rest of the world wound up informing most of the lyrics on the new album. Themes of dislocation and loneliness kept cropping up. "When you're on the road that much, you feel like cowboys on the trail," Burns offers. "You meet cool people, but you don't have time to get deep. The only real interaction you have is with each other."

If that heightened their emotional isolation, then the new music finds the band expanding exponentially. "Goodbye Song" features a vocal breakdown that mimics a Beatles-y, psychedelic cascade, followed by a section with underlying funk. The song also sees the band stretching out with a long, "Down by the River"-style guitar solo, elaborated live by Burns.

On "Happy Again," they boast a Motown-like bass part, forming a kind of audio in-joke: What could be happier than a Berry Gordy hit, after all? While producer Joyce came up with the idea for the part, King is responsible for the album's distinct basslines. "So many bass players just play the root note, which is boring," Young says. "Joel has a natural instinct for melody. Taylor's guitar will go one way and Joel's bass goes the other. If you listen to the bass that McCartney plays with The Beatles, he did that too."

"It's more like a fill than a walking bass," King adds. "If there's a gap in the song, where I can throw something in, I'll do it."

At the same time, the quartet made sure to leave room for the songs to breathe. "Nowadays, songs don't have any space," Burns reasons. "There has to be a word or sound for every fucking beat. You need a small space for the vibe. We want you to feel like you're in the room when you listen."

The group shook things up further by leaving in certain mistakes. "Perfect is boring," Burns bursts out declaratively. "If people liked perfect singers, then Dylan and Lou Reed wouldn't be so popular."

"During 'Into the Sun,' we sing the wrong words at one point," says King.

"That way, it feels like it's happening live; it's being documented," Young adds.

"There's a lot more discovery on this album than the last," says King. "The first time, we had demoed that stuff a bunch of times, so we knew how every song would sound. This time it was like, 'We don't know how the hell this is going to turn out.'"

"We wanted to show our diversity and breadth—that we're not just an alt-rock Americana band, or an alt-country band," Burns explains.

Altogether, the album rocks harder than their first. "The last album was a bit more acoustic because that's the way the songs were written," King admits. "The first record was strum and swing. This is an attack."

Despite the greater tension in the music, The Wild Feathers claim there's shockingly little of it between them personally. They're well aware that most of the '60s and '70s multi-songwriter bands dissolved into vicious turf wars and ego battles. They're determined to circumvent that. "It's a lot harder to get five guys to focus than it is with a solo artist or a DJ," Burns reflects. "You're always going to butt heads on certain things. And there are definitely times we don't get along. But they're few and far between, compared to other bands I've been around. There's not one guy here who's a diva or an asshole."

For King, their setup mirrors something primal. "People like to sing together," he sums up. "Subconsciously, I think all of us craved that, the feeling of 'all-for-one' on a project we can be proud of."

something different and rely on our different strengths, it was pretty captivating. And that shows up quite often on this record." He adds, "When you step back and look at the painting, you can see it was done by our hand, but it comes with a new array of colors. It comes with a new stroke, a new approach."

Smith admits that the writing process resulted in "more arguments and discussions and hand-wringing than during any other album," but in the end, there were also "many more moments of, 'Wow, I am so thankful we found each other.'" It's evidence of what has kept Explosions together and productive for so many years. For the four musicians, who Smith says "complete" each other, tackling this new aesthetic was best done in tandem.

"It was extremely challenging," James says. "At first, we didn't know that we wanted the record to sound like, and we didn't all agree on what being experimental in this kind of writing process was going to entail. We're all extremely good friends and extremely good collaborators—and have been for a very long time—but we all have our own very strong opinions. It took a long time of us getting on the same page of what this album was going to be. We spent about two years arguing and one year actually making it. But it was so worth it."

One of the notable shifts on *The Wilderness* is the length of the songs. Explosions' surging instrumental tones, which evocatively balance sonic and emotional highs and lows, still line up with their recognizable style, but they are terser and more compact. This time, each track doesn't necessarily tell its own lengthy tale—which is something very intentional on the part of the band. The nine songs are statements, but they are not all grandiose statements. Instead, they come together to uncover a singular album identity. That thematic idea, reflected by the title, is nebulous, open to interpretation, and each band member tells it slightly differently. For James, the idea of "the wilderness" is about uncharted territory both outward and inward. It's as much about outer space and its unknowable expanse as it is about the depths of the human mind.

"It all started with us watching the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* way too many times," James notes. "That's been one of our favorite movies forever. That's kind of where that movie gets its power—with the expansive nature of outer space, coupled with the idea of the human personality and the dichotomy between the two."

As with the band's prior album, the names of the songs offer clues as to their intentions. The titles, which Explosions conceive as a band, are not essential, but they do send the listener in the best direction of understanding the songs' meanings. "They help just as a point of reference, as a dot on a map," Rayani admits. "'You are here.' Not having that 'You are here' dot on the map—it's still an intriguing map to be on. Since we play instrumental music, something we are very lucky about is that our music is language-less. It's about how you interpret it. That offers great flexibility and an expansive area of absorption. So the song titles have meaning, but they are not the meaning."

> "If people hate it, I can accept that. But I'll be really bummed if they go, 'Yeah, this just sounds like another Explosions record."
>
> **CHRIS HRASKY**

"When you listen to 'Colors in Space,' maybe think about the 'Star Gate' color sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey*," Smith elaborates. "That's what we watched when writing the whole ending part. When you listen to 'Tangle Formations,' maybe it would be cool to know that the title refers to the way memories are stored in the brain and the way they change during the onset of Alzheimer's. 'Logic of a Dream' refers to the way the four very disparate sections of that song strangely lead to one another, yet make a weird sort of sense."

THE SECOND MAJOR CHANGE ON *THE Wilderness* is how the album was recorded. In the past, Explosions has recorded their albums in almost the same way they would play them live, the songs easily recreatable onstage. But at first it wasn't possible to play *The Wilderness* live because it incorporates so many new elements and new instruments. The band spent two weeks in the studio in July of 2015, which was the longest they've ever spent crafting an LP (the band's first two albums were laid down in a mere two days). They recorded in Dallas with John Congleton, who has engineered several of Explosions' albums and who had a much stronger voice in the process this time around. The highs and lows of the music feel different, and the familiarity of the band's sound is augmented by unfamiliar notes, ones that introduce a wholly alien feeling.

"I hope this album hits some of the emotional nerve centers as our previous albums, but the fact that we're doing it without the big, distorted crescendos and lilting arpeggios and big, searing payoff melodies means that those nerve endings don't feel quite the same," Smith says. "Sometimes I listen to this album and I don't quite know what I'm feeling or what is causing me to feel moved. But the important thing is that I am feeling moved. It's a more emotionally ambiguous album, and that appeals to me greatly because it seems to capture more of what I feel after living 40 years of life. There is not so much of a narrow focus on 'sad' and 'triumphant' as there is a shifting color spectrum of sense and experience."

Now, as Explosions prepares to go out on tour in support of *The Wilderness*, there is the discussion of how these songs will be translated onstage and where they will fit in with the sounds from previous albums. It's yet another challenge for a group in the midst of change. ("I am already looking forward to dozens of hilarious technical problems during shows," Smith notes.) The group is exploring new visuals to accompany them onstage, which may mark a drastic shift from their notably sparse live shows. It's an ongoing experiment, one that has truly breathed new life into the quartet.

"The harder you have to work for something, the more satisfying it is when you're done," James says. "When we were finished with this album, we were all very happy with it. It was exactly the album we all wanted it to be. And whether or not that means it's any good is beside the point. We worked so hard at it and it's something very specific, and we did push ourselves a lot and we pushed each other a lot. To have that very difficult process be what we considered a success was extremely satisfying." He adds: "It's certainly the most interesting thing we've done in the context of our career."

Is there a fear of the possible response to change? Does the band worry that the world tends to resist it, especially when fans are satisfied with—and even in love with—the status quo? "I don't know if people are going to like it or not," Hrasky considers. "I don't know if people who liked *The Earth Is Not a Cold Dead Place* are going to be interested in this record because it doesn't do the same things."

He pauses, carefully considering his words. "I do hope that at least people recognize that we're trying something different," the drummer continues. "If people hate it, I can accept that. But I'll be really bummed if they go, 'Yeah, this just sounds like another Explosions record.' To me, creatively, it feels like a new thing and makes me excited about what we might do next. Maybe, in two years, we'll have some other dumb idea in mind and start over from scratch again."

Esperanza Spalding

BY DEAN BUDNICK

EMILY'S D+EVOLUTION IS much more than Esperanza Spalding's latest album. It is also an all-encompassing, rock-infused, jazz-informed artistic expression that incorporates stage design and performance art. The bassist/vocalist/composer, who was born Esperanza Emily Spalding, explains, "We're setting up a world, and a premise to play the music within. We see Emily as a character within this world. We see how she comes in and we see how she engages. She is the embodiment of a kind of energy that needed to come through in my life. She's very playful and she's innocent, in a way. She's not of this world so she doesn't understand the rules and the dichotomies. She's also a reconciling force because she engages with all aspects of the world around her and, by doing so, she brings about a kind of mutual reconciliation. She brings people together without one diminishing the other in the common space of play and creative expression."

Emily came to you in a moment of epiphany?

On Oct. 17, 2013, I was in my hotel room after a gig with Geri Allen and Terri Lyne Carrington. I was super restless and charged full of energy. It was the day before my birthday, so it was a natural level of excitement. I was lying there thinking and just started seeing these little vignettes and hearing this sound and these performances. There was this character and she had glasses and her name was Emily. I was digging on this little thing playing out in my mind, and I decided to leap into that. So the next day, I got my hair pressed because I knew that Emily's hair had to be bound so she could feel gravity. I told Geri and Terry, "Let's toast the birth of Emily." And they were like, "OK, what is that?" When I told them what I was going to do, they were like, "Cool."

How long did it take for your concept to manifest itself in music?

During that first evening, I heard a lot of things. I was watching the little vignettes and trying to make notes and sing reminders of what it looked like and sounded like. Some of those sketches ultimately became songs on the record. Most of what the sketches led me to was a concept and an aesthetic, an energy that the music has to it. From that moment on, I was writing it. At the end of that tour, at the baggage claim, I had written the chorus part to "Judas" and, from that moment on, I was committing myself to Emily's music.

In describing your performance of this material, you've said, "We're allowed to pretend to be ourselves."

I think it's true. It's fun—we're doing it every day, all day. I dress up before I leave my house. Why don't I just get five pairs of the same jeans and wear what I wore yesterday? I dress up today because I think this outfit is going to show something about me that is important to me. I'm doing something in dressing up to go out and be myself. In the realm of roleplay or acting or performing, you literally are pretending to get closer to what you're all about. Sometimes the amplified state is closer to the reality than the undressed, unadorned state—at least it can invite someone in to see an aspect of the true you that they may not notice if you weren't "pretending."

Ginger Baker and Cream had a role in your creative process?

Two days before we were going to go into the studio in LA to record the first batch—we did this in three batches—I stayed with Wayne and Carolina Shorter. Wayne's a movie maniac, so we're always watching movies, and this *Beware of Mr. Baker* documentary had come out. He asked me if I had seen it and I said no, so we watched it. I did not know who Ginger Baker was. I'd heard the name Cream, but I didn't know their music. As I'm watching this man's development from this jazz-loving, West-African-music-loving devotee of the craft to this epic rock pillar, I said, "Oh, my God, I feel like that. I identify with that trajectory—you love this music, you love the masters of the music, and you want to get loud and write songs with your friends and rock out."

I realized we had, in our own way, sort of stumbled upon not a language, but a sensibility in terms of using the vocabulary, the vernacular of improvised music and the things that we do instrumentally within that vernacular and how they get expressed in a rock aesthetic. I found a kindred spirit, at least musically. So I went into the studio and was like, "Oh, my God, you guys, Ginger Baker exists!" And they were all like, "Duh." We were about to go into the studio, so it's not like we suddenly changed everything because we heard that, but it really bolstered my confidence because I was scared shitless. I still am, most of the time, when we're doing this project.

Is there another film that Wayne Shorter has screened for you that has made a significant impact on your life?

The Red Shoes—that's his favorite and now it's one of my favorite movies. I'll watch it any time, any day, five times in a row. I love it so much. That was a big boon to my life. I remember, when I was in elementary school, they played for us a sequence from that film that is just a performance of the actual ballet *The Red Shoes*, and it scared the shit out of me. So it was cool to have it come back around through my most important mentor and to see how it spoke to me now as a grown-up. It's really one of the most epic films ever made. I think it's kind of the best of all worlds.

You're working on an opera with Wayne Shorter?

I have been assigned the task, the gift, the journey and the mission of writing the libretto. I'm still really in research/sketch mode, but he's writing the music. He chose the topic material, he's the philosophical mastermind behind the project, and I will be writing the libretto. We're looking for our patrons of the arts. It's a long, slogging process to get a new work funded and produced, so we're still in that phase—Wayne is not because he absolutely needs to just be a genius and sit there and write. So the people who are on this beautiful, unpaid team of love—who have committed themselves to seeing this opera come to fruition—are still in that phase of walking in our partners. If you know any barons or dukes out there who want to be a part of history in the making, please send them my way.

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